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AFTER TWENTY YEARS

BY

JULIAN STEIGIS

WIDENER



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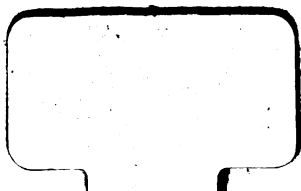
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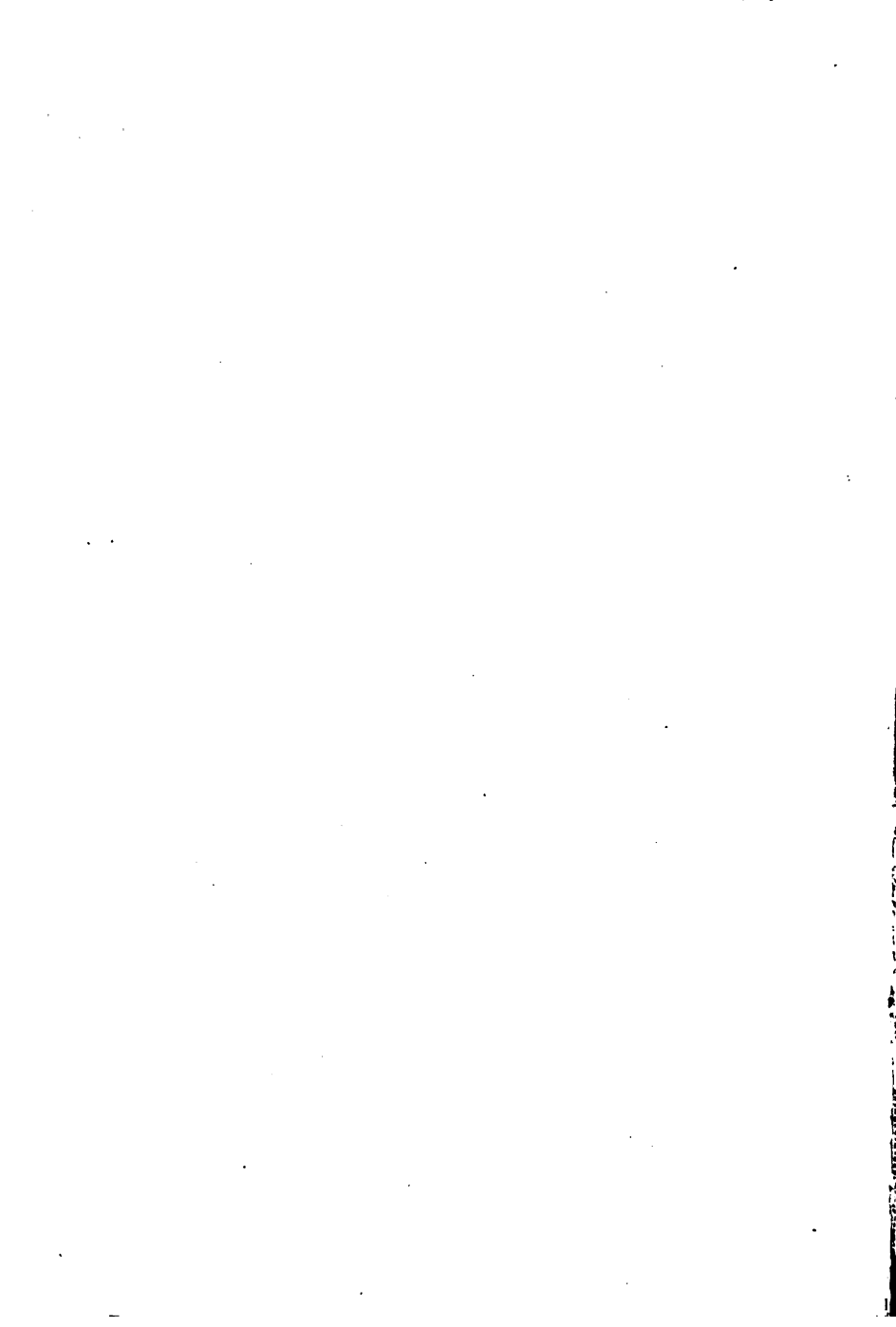
FROM

S. E. Morison



AFTER TWENTY YEARS

AND OTHER STORIES.



AFTER TWENTY YEARS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

JULIAN STURGIS

AUTHOR OF "MY FRIENDS AND I," "THEALDOM," ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK

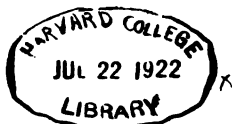
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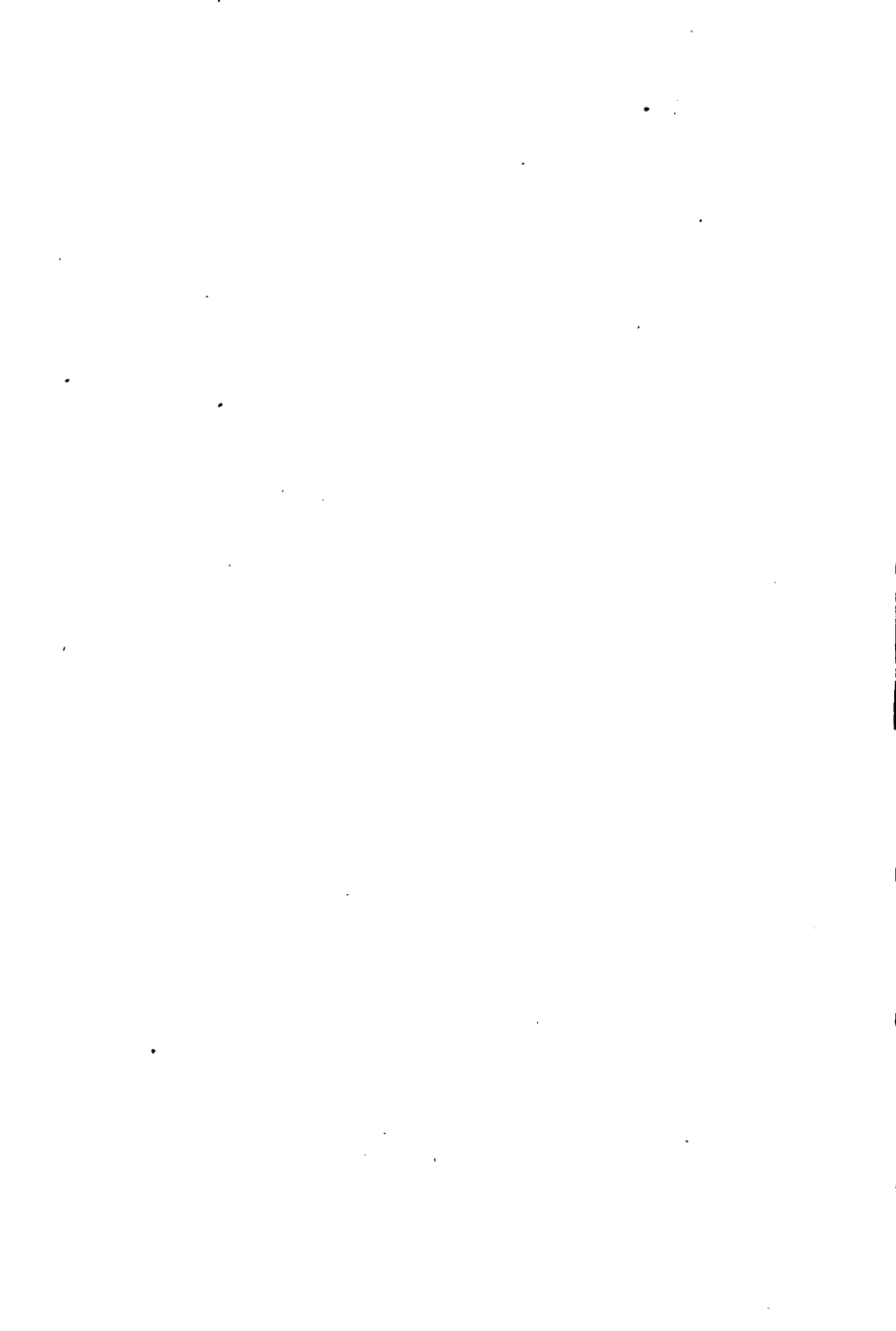
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PREFACE.

IN sending forth this little book, to find, I hope, a few readers on either side of the great sea, I must begin by thanking Messrs. Longmans, Messrs. Blackwood, and Messrs. Macmillan for leave to print again those tales which already have had the distinction of appearing in their magazines.

Even as I write this, there comes back to me again a warm feeling of gratitude and kindness for my old friend Mr. John Blackwood, the friend of so many in his day, who in 1874 accepted, to my great joy, and published in his famous periodical, my first sketch, "The Philosopher's Baby." After nearly twenty years "The Philosopher's Baby" now again makes his bow—if babies bow. This is the first tale in the book; and the last, which gives its name to the volume, was written but a few months ago

and is now printed for the first time. Between these two the other tales, or sketches, appear again in order of their first appearing, written at intervals short or long, each independent of the others, yet with something in common, which may make them more interesting, when put together here, than was any one of them in its first brief life of a month.

Let that hope plead for me ; and if these sketches, or tales, seem nevertheless to the severe unworthy of the somewhat longer life of a book, it is want of wit and not want of care which made them so : nor do I know any better way of arriving at the certainty of their little worth than offering them here anew to the readers of such things, and waiting with an equal mind to see if they will read them or no.

J. S.

THE PHILOSOPHER'S BABY.



THE PHILOSOPHER'S BABY .

I HAD been considering for about a year whether I should marry Winifred Hanway, when I heard that she was engaged to the Philosopher. Why did she accept him? It is true that he is both imaginative and critical; but faculties exercised in the formation of psychological hypotheses and the laborious destruction of those of one's neighbour do not usually rouse the sympathy of a bright and beautiful girl, who is more fit to live than to think about life. He is certainly handsome, but as certainly his clothes are barbarous. His trousers cannot keep their shape for a day, and his hats are never new. If he notices the rain, he opens an umbrella which might have served as an ineffectual protection at the time of the Deluge; if he finds out that it is cold, he assumes a garment which might have been the every-day coat of Methuselah. His manners are

as strange as his appearance. He may often be seen walking in the Park at the fashionable hour with a far-off look in his eyes, and his hat thrust back as if to lessen the external pressure on his active brain; more rarely you may hear him bursting into enthusiasm in Piccadilly, though Piccadilly is the last place in which a man should allow himself to be enthusiastic. In short, though he is a true friend, he is an uncomfortable acquaintance; and his volcanic utterances, after long periods of calm contemplation, cause such shocks to one's nerves as would be conveyed to the Sunday citizen by the sudden eruption of Primrose Hill. But if it was odd that the beautiful Winifred Hanway should marry my friend, it was yet more odd that he should marry any one. There were no topics more certain to excite an explosion in the philosopher than the excessive population of the country, and the wholesome solitude of the Thinker. "How," he would fiercely ask, "can a man think effectually on fundamental subjects, who is compelled by the despicable circumstances of his life to exhaust his analytical faculty in considering how to pay his butcher and when to buy his coals? I tell you,

sir, it's better to starve with cold and hunger than to debase one's noblest part to a game of skill with a grasping grocer." Again and again I had heard him declaim in this preposterous fashion; and after all, he was going to the altar like any other victim, and would doubtless take a house upon his back with the docility of a snail.

I could not solve the problem; I would not give it up. So, full of the determination to drag Diogenes out of his tub, and the secret out of Diogenes, I stepped round the corner to offer my congratulations. My friend was in his study apparently writing, really eating a quill pen. He rose at me with a rush, wrung my hand till it ached, and blushed rather uncomfortably. Congratulations are the curse of the Briton. Whether he is offering them or receiving them, he is generally obliged to take refuge in intermittent hand-shaking, and most of his sentences tail off into grunts and groans. But on this occasion it was evident that the philosopher had something ready to say, and was nervously anxious to say it. Indeed, I had hardly said more than "My dear fellow, I don't know when . . . I really am so awfully glad, I . . . it's in

every way so, such a satisfactory, you know . . . I really do wish all possible, and all that sort of thing, you know"—when he burst in with a speech so fluently delivered, that I knew I was not his earliest visitor that morning.

"Of course it's taken you by surprise," he said, "as I knew it would; but the truth is, that I have been thinking of it for a long time, and I am sure I am right." Here I tried to get in an expression of wonder at his new notion of duty, but he was bent on being rid of the matter, and hurried on to his reasons. "In the first place," said he, "I am sure that, instead of increasing my domestic worries, my marriage will transfer them in a body to my wife; and, secondly, when I consider the vast number of fools who are every day born into the world, I am terrified by the picture of what the next generation will be, if the thinkers of this are to be without successors." Having discharged his reasons in this wise, the orator stood blinking at me as if he feared dissent, but I was too astounded by his magnificent audacity to reply. Slowly a look of peace stole back into his face, a pleasant light dawned in his eyes, and the promise of a smile at the corner of his mouth. His remark-

able fluency was gone, and indeed his voice sounded quite choky when he said, "Johnny, you don't know what an angel she is." A light broke in upon me.

"Philosopher," I said, "I believe you are going to be married because you fell in love?" "Perhaps you are right," said the philosopher.

After the wedding the philosopher and his wife went abroad for an indefinite period, and their friends heard but little of them. He wrote to nobody, and she did not write to me. Yet there were occasional rumours. Now they were breathing the keen air of the Engadine, now sinking to the chestnuts and vines of Chiavenna; now he was lashing himself to frenzy over the treasures of Rome; now she was gazing with sweet northern eyes across the glowing splendour of the Bay of Naples. Then they were in Germany, and about to settle for life in a university town; but anon had fled from it in haste after a long night's dispute, in the course of which my learned friend had well-nigh come to blows with the university's most celebrated professor.

At last I heard that they were again in Lon-

don, and, full of enthusiasm, I darted round the corner to welcome them home. Nobody was with them but Mrs. Hanway, Winifred's mother. I would enter unannounced, and surprise the philosopher. I entered unannounced, and was surprised myself. Was this the effect of matrimony or of foreign travel? Each occupant of the room was engaged in an exercise wholly unconnected, as it seemed, with those of the rest. My friend's wife, the lady whom I had almost loved, queen of all grace and comeliness, was appearing and disappearing like a flash behind the day's 'Times,' showing at the moments of disclosure a face flushed with excitement, and lustrous coils of hair tumbled into the wildest disorder, while she accompanied the whole performance with strange and inarticulate sounds. Her mother, the same Mrs. Hanway who was so perfect a model of dress and carriage that many of her lady friends were wont to lament among themselves that she gave herself such airs, was seated on the floor dressed for walking, but without her bonnet. Yes, she was certainly drumming on an inverted tea-tray with the wrong end of the poker. And the philosopher? It was perplexing, after three years'

separation, to meet him thus. The philosopher was cantering round the room on all-fours, wearing on his head his own waste-paper basket. Briskly he cantered round, ever and anon frisking like a lamb in spring-time, until he reached my feet, which were rooted to the spot with astonishment. He glanced up sideways, rose with a cry to the normal attitude of man, and grasped me by the hand. At the sound of his voice, his wife dropping the paper from her hands raised them quickly to her hair; and his mother-in-law, with as much dignity as the effort would allow, scrambled on to her feet. Then in an instant the cause of their eccentric conduct was made clear. Throned upon the hearth-rug, and showing by a gracious smile a few of the newest teeth, sat a fine baby of some fifteen months. In one dimpled fist was tightly clinched the brush which had so neatly arranged the mother's braids; while the other was engaged in pounding the grandmother's best bonnet into a shapeless mass.

We were all somewhat embarrassed except the baby. The ladies knew that they were untidy, and I that I was an intruder. As for the learned father, he stood now on one leg and now

on the other, while he shifted the waste-paper basket from hand to hand, and continued to smile almost as perseveringly as his amiable offspring. Yet it was he who at last put an end to our awkward position by expressing a wild desire to have my opinion of the new curtains in his study. Rather sheepishly I said good-bye to the lady of the house, trying to express by my eyes that I would never call again unannounced. I knew that Mrs. Hanway had not forgiven me, as I humbly took the two fingers which she offered; and I felt like a brute, as the most important member of the family condescended to leave a damp spot by the edge of my left whisker.

When, however, I had been swept downstairs by my impulsive friend, and was alone with him in his den, my courage returned, and with it some indignation. I confronted him, and sternly asked why I had not been told that he was a father.

"Not been told?" echoed he; "do you mean to say that you did not know about the Baby?"

"Not so much as that it was," I replied, gloomily. He was overwhelmed: of course he had supposed that every one knew it

from the Queen downwards. Of course fifty people ought to have told me, who of course had told me everything else. At last my curiosity got the better of my indignation, and I cut short his apologies by beginning my questions—"Does the shape of its head content you?" I asked.

"The shape of whose what?" cried the philosopher, apparently too surprised for grammar.

"Of the baby's head, of course," I replied, tartly; "I merely wish to know if the child is likely to be as intellectual as you hoped."

"Isn't the hair lovely?" he asked, inconsequently.

This was too much, and assuming my severest manner I delivered myself in this wise—"I thought, though no doubt I was wrong, that the use of a baby to you would be partly to furnish you with raw material for a philosopher, partly to enable you by constant observation to gain further evidence bearing on such vexed questions as, whether the infant gains its idea of space by feeling about, whether it is conscious of itself, etc."

"Well," he said, laughing, "I don't expect much help from my infant in those matters,

unless I can get inside her and think her thoughts."

"Her thoughts?" cried I, in amazement; "you don't mean to say it's a girl? Good gracious! you are not going to educate a female philosopher?"

He looked rather vexed. "Of course it's a girl," he said.

"The father of a female philosopher?" I gasped. "Dear me!" said he, somewhat testily; "isn't it enough to be the father of a noble woman?"

Now I have often put up with a great deal from my learned friend, and am quite aware that I have been spoken of as "Bozzy" behind my back. But there is a turning-point even for the worm, and nobody will sit forever at the feet which are constantly kicking him. I had been snubbed more than enough by this illogical parent, and assuming my most sarcastic manner, I inquired, with an appearance of deference—"Is it not rather early to speak of your daughter as a noble woman?"

"Not at all," said the philosopher.

I had kept aloof from the philosopher for

some weeks, nursing my wrath, like Achilles I said to myself—cross as a bear, I overheard my landlady say in the passage—when I received a hasty note begging me to come to him at once. I fancied myself summoned to a council of chiefs; so, having donned my shining armour, I left my tent with fitting dignity, and descended with a clang into the plain. Yet I could not but be aware of my landlady's eye piercing me through the crack of the parlour-door, purposely left ajar, and of the hasty flapping of loose slippers which told the startled slavey's flight into the abyss below.

An unusual silence held my friend's house that morning. The door was opened, before I had time to ring, by a melancholy footman, who, walking before me with the elaborate delicacy of an Agag, noiselessly ushered me into the study. It was my lot to be again rooted to the spot with amazement. By the bookcase, in a shaded corner of the room, with his head bowed low upon his hands, knelt the philosopher. Here was a long step from the siege of Troy, from the simple wrath of a childlike hero to the most complex embarrassment of an heir of all the ages. What should I do? The

dismal menial had fled to the shades, without a word, without even a glance into the room. If I retreated, I left my friend unaided, and remained ignorant of the cause of his strange conduct. If I advanced, I was again the intruder on a scene not prepared for my inspection. In an agony of hesitation I fell to brushing my hat with my elbow ; but not finding the expected relief in the occupation, I was about to desist, when my hat decided what my head could not, by falling with a crack on the floor. The effect was electrical. Without one glance at the intruder, the philosopher made a grab at the nearest book-shelf, dragged out a volume which had not been touched for half a century, and hunted for nothing in its pages with frantic eagerness. He was still at it, when I stood over him and noted without wonder that he held the book upside down ; then with the poorest imitation of surprise which I have ever seen, he rose and grasped my hand. " You found me on the track of something," he said ; " I was looking it out in—in——"

Here it occurred to him that he did not know the name of the venerable tome which he had so rudely disturbed ; and with a heightened

colour and a sudden change of manner he turned quickly to me and said, "My child is ill." I felt positively guilty. I had been angry with that baby for making my wise friend foolish, for not being a boy, for being called "a noble woman." Was it not shameful that a great hulking brute should sneer at a weak thing that could not even answer with a taunt? Were not my clumsy sarcasms enough to crush so delicate a plant? The poor little "noble woman" was in danger, and I could do nothing to help her. There were tears in the eyes which were looking into mine for comfort; but I had nothing ready to say.

"I could not stand being alone," he muttered, after a short silence; "the doctor is with her now, and in a moment I may hear that my little daughter must—in fact may hear the worst."

While he was speaking, I seemed to have fifty consoling remarks to offer; but when he stopped, no one sentence would disengage itself from the rest. What I blurted out at last seems almost ridiculous as I look back on it.

"You must hope for the best," I said; "you know she has youth on her side."

The words were scarcely out of my mouth when I heard a measured step upon the stairs; presently the door was opened by the noiseless footman, and the most famous of London doctors entered the room. My friend leaned heavily on my arm, but looked at the man of science with seeming calm.

"I am happy to say," said the physician, cheerily, "that our little friend is going on as well as possible."

"And she is out of danger?"

"She never was in it."

"Never in danger?" cried I, almost disappointed.

"She has nothing the matter with her," he replied, "but a slight feverish cold. I have seldom seen a finer or more healthy child. Good-morning."

I never was more annoyed. Here was a waste of my finest feelings. Here was I stirred to the depth, well-nigh moved to tears, by a baby's feverish cold. Of course I was very glad that it was no worse; but my friend was too absurd, and I would not spare him.

"Won't you resume your studies?" I asked,

sarcastically, pointing to the disturbed book, which was lying on the ground at our feet.

His humility might have disarmed me: "I am afraid I've been a fool," he said; "but if you had seen her all flushed and breathing hard; and then she is so small and fragile."

"Yes, for a noble woman," I remarked; he received the dart meekly. "Philosopher," said I, suddenly, determined to rouse him at any cost, "when I entered this room, you were engaged in prayer." His colour certainly deepened. "May I ask," I inquired with an appearance of deference, "whether you were addressing yourself to the Personal First Cause, or to the Unknowable—but perhaps you were merely bowing to the rational order of the Universe?"

He made a gesture of impatience, but answered still with studied moderation, "I was alone and in trouble."

"And the efficacy of prayer?" I asked.

"For heaven's sake," cried he, bursting into excitement, "stop your jargon! Nothing shows such ignorance of a subject as having all its cant phrases on the tip of your tongue. Can't

I speak to God without expecting to be paid for it?"

This was turning the tables. If he was going to take to questions, I knew I should end by admitting myself a fool. So to avoid a Socratic dialogue I put my hand on my friend's shoulder and said: "You are a good man, philosopher; may you and the 'noble woman' live a thousand years."

"Thank you," he said, simply; "and now you must let me go and sing a pæan with the nobler woman, my patient Penelope, my sweet wife."

So he went with long strides over the asphodel meadow, and I betook myself to my tent full of pleasant thoughts.

THE DISAPPOINTING BOY.

THE DISAPPOINTING BOY.

"MY dear Septimus," I said, "I congratulate you on your son. He is a most pleasant fellow; cheerful without silliness—intelligent, but not a prig."

"Humph!" replied my friend.

A great part of conversation in this country is carried on by grunts; but if there is anything which cannot be expressed in this manner, it is cordial assent. I relapsed into silence, and filled my glass. Septimus passed his hand over his hair, which is rather long, and still thick though streaked with many threads of gray, and gazed thoughtfully through the window, which opened on to the lawn. A faint light lingered in the west, and one star shone brilliantly above the black cedar, near which was dimly seen the graceful figure of my friend's wife. At her side was the young man on whom, moved by genuine liking and

the emotions natural to a benevolent person who has dined well, I had just pronounced a seemingly inopportune panegyric. We sat at a round table, over which a shaded light was hanging, and the claret passed slowly between us. It was too old to be hurried. After a silence of a few minutes, my friend leaned back in his chair, and said :

“If it would not bore you, I should like to tell you a few anecdotes of my dear boy’s life.”

“Pray, do,” I said. I was in the mood for listening—disposed for silence and moderately curious. Septimus has a manner gentle as the evening, and a voice which might have grown mellow in his own cellar.

“It has long seemed to me,” he began, “that the rules of conduct which we try to impress on our children are absurdly inconsistent with those by which we expect them to regulate their later life. When they are young they are to be unobtrusive, and to give up to everybody ; when they have reached man’s estate they are to give way to nobody, but to push their fortunes in the world. As well might we punish the child for going near the water,

and expect the man to swim; or train the runner for the race by making him walk backwards. When Tommy was born, I made up my mind to avoid the common error. In the battle of life he should be taught to win, and not to go round, when the fighting was over, with a red cross on his arm. When he was a baby he showed a great love of colour, and would lie for hours smiling at the sunlight, and making little motions with his hands. It seemed clear to me in those days that the child would be a great painter (you know that I was always fond of art), and take a high position. There is a great opening in that direction. An active man, who cultivates a bold style, and is above niggling over details, can paint ten pictures in the year, and, when he has made a name, can sell them for £1000 each. When I pointed out to Jessie what a road to fortune lay before our baby, she laughed at him, and called him Tommy R.A.

“But of course in those days I could not be sure of the line in which my son would excel. My duty was to prepare him to excel in any which he might choose, by developing in him the taste for competition. I looked about for

a competitor, and had the good luck to find my little nephew Theodore, who is ten minutes older than Tommy. I borrowed him from his parents, and at once brought the two lads into competition. I well remember my first attempt, and its failure. I had been left in charge of the children for a short time, and, seizing the opportunity, induced them to race across the room for a lump of sugar."

Here I interrupted my friend by asking if the boys were not young for education.

"Not at all," said he; "for let me tell you that in these days, when the idea of individual liberty is in the air we breathe, children rebel against the influence of their parents almost before they are breeched."

"You surprise me," I said, "and well-nigh make me accept the poet's picture. You remember the lines?

' Didst never hear how the rebellious Egg
Stood up i' the straw, and to his Mother Goose
Cried, Madam, I will not be sat upon? ' "

Septimus smiled in a deprecating manner, somewhat uncertain, I think, whether I were in jest or earnest. He continued his story: "Tommy was a good walker, if you make

allowance for the novelty of the accomplishment, but lost some time in lateral motions like those of a landsman on a rolling sea ; therefore Theodore, who had a perpetual inclination forward, and went with an involuntary goose-step, took the lead at once, and would have won, had not his head, advancing too quickly for his legs, come suddenly in contact with the floor. Now was my boy's chance ; but instead of going by his cousin, who was prostrate and howling, he sat down on the carpet and bel-lowed twice as loud for sympathy. Jessie said that I ought to be ashamed of myself, and divided the lump of sugar between the competitors.

“ When the boys were a little older, I again borrowed Theodore, and made a little class of him and Tommy, hoping for healthy rivalry in the acquisition of knowledge. I began with an opening address, in which I pointed out to them that the duty of each was to beat the other ; and that, as every man in the grown-up world was trying to get as much of the luxuries and honours as he could, so each boy should try to gain for himself as large a share as possible of the marbles, toffee, and other

prizes, which I should from time to time offer. They heard me with great gravity, and our opening day was a decided success. I soon found, however, that my prize system was a failure, since, as the students always played together, they cared not a jot who won the toys, which they enjoyed in common; and as to the toffee, they both suffered so much after the first prize-day, that Jessie put her veto on that form of reward.

“After this I determined to substitute pennies, and for a time thought that I had effected my purpose. Tommy grew wonderfully industrious, and in spite of my strict impartiality accumulated a vast store of copper. Week after week he drew on me with papers of marks, which were duly honoured, until I saw myself in days to be the aged father of the first of Gentile financiers. He should direct the application of his neighbours’ fortunes, speculate in a gigantic war, become Baron Tommy at a foreign court, perhaps Sir Thomas at his own. My dream was rudely dispelled. One day my small nephew came to me in great glee. ‘Uncle Septimus,’ said he, ‘do you know that it is my birthday?’ ‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘and

Tommy's birthday too, although you certainly gained an advantage over him, for which no activity on his part can ever compensate.' 'And please, Uncle Septimus,' continued Theodore, 'do look at the present which Tommy has given me;' and he held up a highly decorated whip and scarlet reins. It was but too clear that the fortune which my son had accumulated by his industry had been expended in a present for the defeated candidate; and when questioned on the subject, the young prodigal at once allowed that this had been the sole motive of his extraordinary devotion to study. While I was trying to impress upon him that if the triumph of the successful resulted in the gain of the unsuccessful competitor, emulation was impossible, his mother came in with a rush and hugged him. Jessie is apt to act from impulse, as almost all women are. When I pointed out to her, on one occasion, that unless everybody is always trying to get as much of everything for himself as he can, the most valuable laws of political economy are false, she said that she did not care if they were, and that she knew that it was better to help another than to help one's self."

Here I could not help interrupting my friend Septimus with the remark that there was no better way of helping one's self than appearing as a helper of others, if you knew the right moment at which to leave them ; and that some had grown wonderfully rich in this manner.

Septimus seemed to think my remark irrelevant, for he took no notice of it, but continued his story.

"You may suppose," he said, "that in choosing a school for my boy I should be greatly influenced by size ; for, if competition be a good, the wider the field of competition the better. I sent him off to Eton with a copy of Mr. Smiles's stimulating work on 'Self-Help,' and a manual of political economy, to which his mother added a large hamper and a Bible. His school career was fairly successful, and would have been brilliant but for that moral obliquity, of which, alas ! there was no longer room to doubt. There was no limit to his generosity, which was constantly developed by an ever-growing popularity. There never was so popular a boy. The masters could hardly find fault with him, and his school-fellows made

a hero of him, as was natural, indeed, for he could refuse them nothing. His gaiety, which never flagged, grew riotous when he was conferring a favour. He was the author of more Latin verses than have been left to us by the poets of Rome, and never dashed off his own copy until he had wooed the Muses to the side of Tomkins, Brabazon, Jones, Montgomery, and a host of others. Again and again I told him, both orally and by letter, that popularity is the reward of those who are the gulls of society; that there is no current coin of so little value; and that the only real proof of a man's success is the jealousy which he excites. He now not only neglected my advice, but even respectfully contradicted me; and it must be confessed that his answers had a great look of brilliancy, for he was an unusually clever lad, and might now be anywhere if he chose. I ought to add that he never grew angry in argument. He has his mother's sweet temper, which is a very good thing in a woman.

"Perhaps you think that I have given undue importance to trifles; and indeed I made light of them myself until my son, in a great crisis of his career, behaved in a manner which I

could not misinterpret, though I am thankful to say that I could pardon it. He was now eighteen years old, when he and his greatest friend, a boy of the name of Dart, entered together for scholarships at one of the Oxford colleges. I will not linger over the story; indeed, if you will excuse me for a moment, I will fetch my son's letter, from which you will learn the catastrophe at a glance, while I shall be spared the pain of recital."

Septimus, who had risen slowly while he was speaking, crossed the passage to his study, and came back with the following note, which he placed in my hands:—

"OXFORD, — 18—.

"MY DEAR FATHER,—I hope that you won't be awfully sick at what I have done; but I am afraid that you won't like it. I thought of you a great deal before I made up my mind, but I don't know what else I could have done. There is a fellow up here called Mills, who is just going to take his degree, and is very thick with the dons. He was at my tutor's when I first went to Eton, and was very keen that I should get one of the scholarships here. Some-

how or other he found out from one of his don friends (which, of course, he had no business to do), before the last day of the examination, that a Clifton fellow was pretty safe for the first scholarship, and that the other was a very near thing between Dart and me. Now you know that old Dart could not have come up to Oxford at all if he had not got a scholarship, and it did not make any difference to me, because you always let me do what I want. So the fact is, that I did not do quite my best in the last papers. I am as good as sure that it did not make the least difference in the world; for Dart is a perfect needler at a critical paper (Greek particles and scholarship tips, etc., you know), and was bound to lick me any way. Only I did not like to keep it dark from you; though of course he must never know anything about it; and you never saw any fellow so happy as he is; and so you must not be vexed, or at least must have got over it before you see your affectionate son,

TOMMY.

“*P.S.*—Of course you will tell the mother, and she will make you forgive me, I know. I am awfully well and happy; and the fellows here are tremendously kind and jolly.”

When I had finished reading this scholarly composition, and had breathed a sigh for the lost slang of my early days, it occurred to me that I had a chance of praising my young friend for a virtue which even a parent could not deny him. And calling to mind an old tale of our university life, at which Sep and I were wont to smile when we were careless undergraduates, I laughed, and said: "You should be thankful for so honest a son, who did not 'keep it dark,' as he might have done. He seems as anxious to avoid all misunderstanding as was Toby O'Connor, when he carefully scratched his name upon the stone which he afterwards flung through the dean's plate-glass window."

This anecdote had never before failed to raise a smile; but my friend was evidently in no mood for laughter. After a simper of acknowledgment, he carefully folded up the letter, and, smoothing it with his hand, continued his story.

"Can you imagine my feelings when I read this missive?" he said. "I could not speak; so I threw it across the breakfast-table to Jessie, and went away to my study. For a full half-

hour there was no sound. Then I heard the door of the dining-room open, and my wife's step in the passage. I called to her. When she came in, I saw that her eyes were full of tears. I took her in my arms, and begged her not to fret about it, saying that it was a terrible disappointment, and that we must bear it together. I was quite choky, and she did not appear to hear me. 'O Septimus,' she said, after a few minutes, 'what have we done that God should have given us such a noble son?' and she burst out sobbing. I have long ceased to feel surprise at the behaviour of women. Every man marries a Sphinx. The power which that boy, with his frank manner, cheery laughter, and honest heart (for I admit his charm, as who does not?), had got over his mother, who is no fool, I can tell you, was inexplicable. If he had robbed the bank to buy sweetmeats for the urchins of Little Britain, I believe that his mother would have cried for joy and gone to say her prayers. There is a peculiar beauty about a woman's character; but as to expecting rational conduct or logical argument, you might as well make a salad of roses or try to walk in high-heeled boots."

Septimus had now finished the anecdotes of his son. Leaning his head upon his hand, and looking across the table, he asked, "What is my boy to be?"

"What does he wish to be?" I asked in turn.

"That is just what I asked him the other day," said my friend, with a half-smile; "and the young wretch suggested that he should follow my profession."

"Your profession!" cried I, in amazement. I had known Septimus all my life, and was well aware that he had never followed an occupation for more than six days at a time. The routine of work which he planned on Monday morning never could survive the intervention of the following Sunday.

My friend looked at me rather comically, and said, "I am afraid he was laughing at me. You know that I went in for all sorts of things when I was a young man. I was wild about art at one time; and once I seriously thought of making a fortune on the Stock Exchange. You remember my devotion to literature, and how I studied architecture that year when we travelled together. I might have made something of them, if I had not been so often antic-

ipated by Mr. Matthew Arnold, Mr. Ruskin, and others. It was not until I was engaged to Jessie that I took up political economy, and found that I had been an unproductive consumer. It is a wonderful science, and makes humanity so simple, showing you that all men are very much alike, if you look at them in the right way, and don't confuse yourself by the analysis of people's characters."

"Well, Septimus," I said, "you can't be surprised that your son should be as idle a young dog as you were in your youth. Perhaps he may some day catch this science, as you did, for it is certainly in the air."

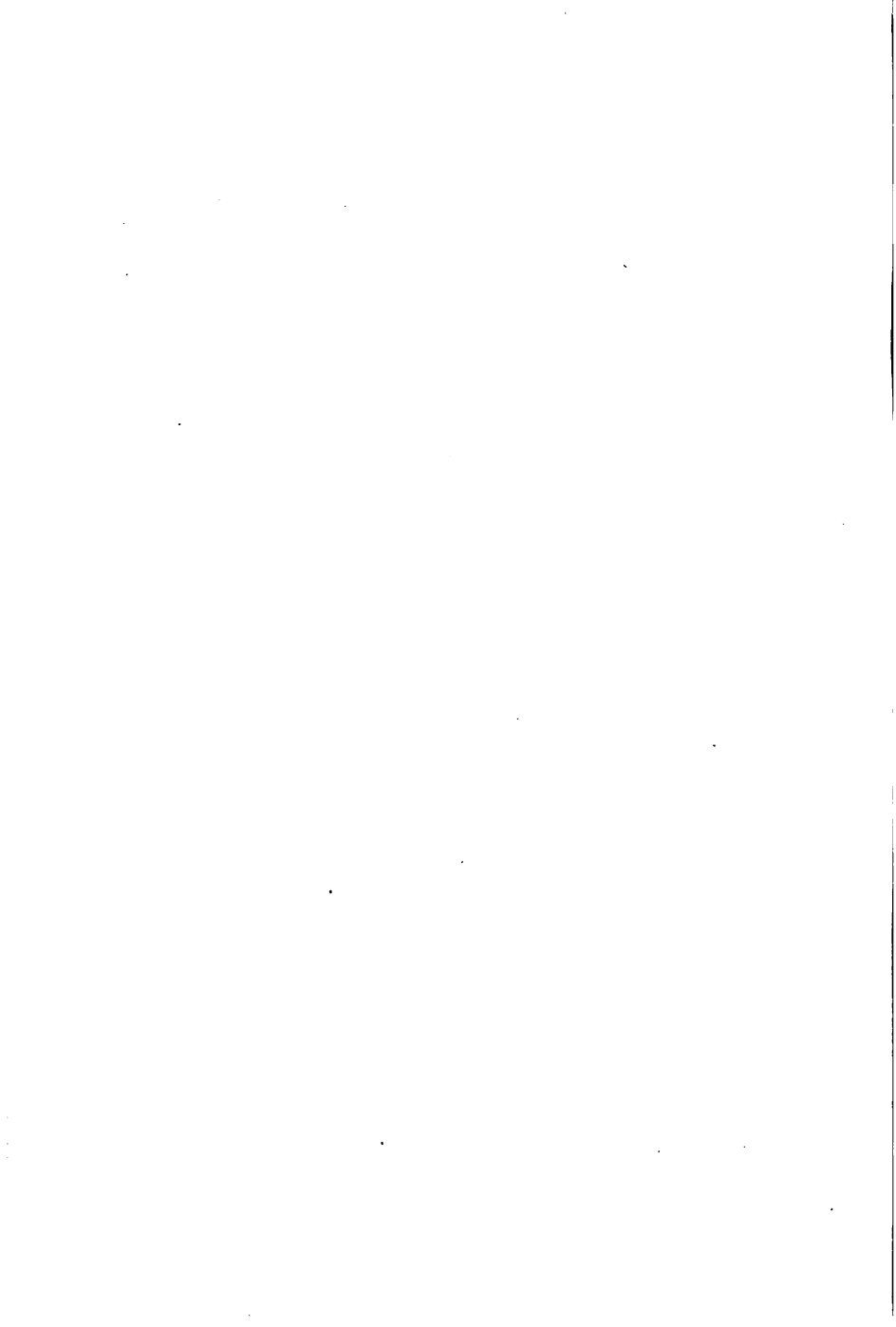
"But," said Septimus, "the curious thing is that he is not idle at all. On the contrary, he works very steadily, but hates to get anything for it. I have shown him bishops in their aprons, and judges in their gowns, but without the slightest effect. When I took him into the House of Commons he expressed an opinion that all the members should wear wigs like the Speaker's, maintaining that no man could be revolutionary in a wig. He added that, but for the head-gear of the lawyers, codification would be inevitable. When I introduced him

to the peer of my acquaintance, he cross-questioned the noble lord about his tenants' cottages. I should suppose him to be entirely without reverence, if he did not sometimes burst into enthusiasm over people of whom, for the most part, I have never heard, and who have certainly achieved no position. But, though he is without ambition, he is so far from idleness that his industry is almost a vice. He not only pursues every study, which cannot possibly lead to fortune or place, but he occupies his spare time with other people's business. Some days ago my labourer (I had but one) abruptly left the place, and on inquiry I found that Tommy, anxious to diminish the surplus agricultural population, had helped him to emigrate. He is on the point of delivering a series of lectures to our peaceful rustics, who have heretofore been perfectly satisfied with my penny readings, and by these means he will probably depopulate the village. He talks of a visit of inspection to the valley of the Mississippi. In short, I begin to fear that I am the father of an agitator. A strange lad, of whom the only thing which you can safely predict is that he will do what he likes, and that his

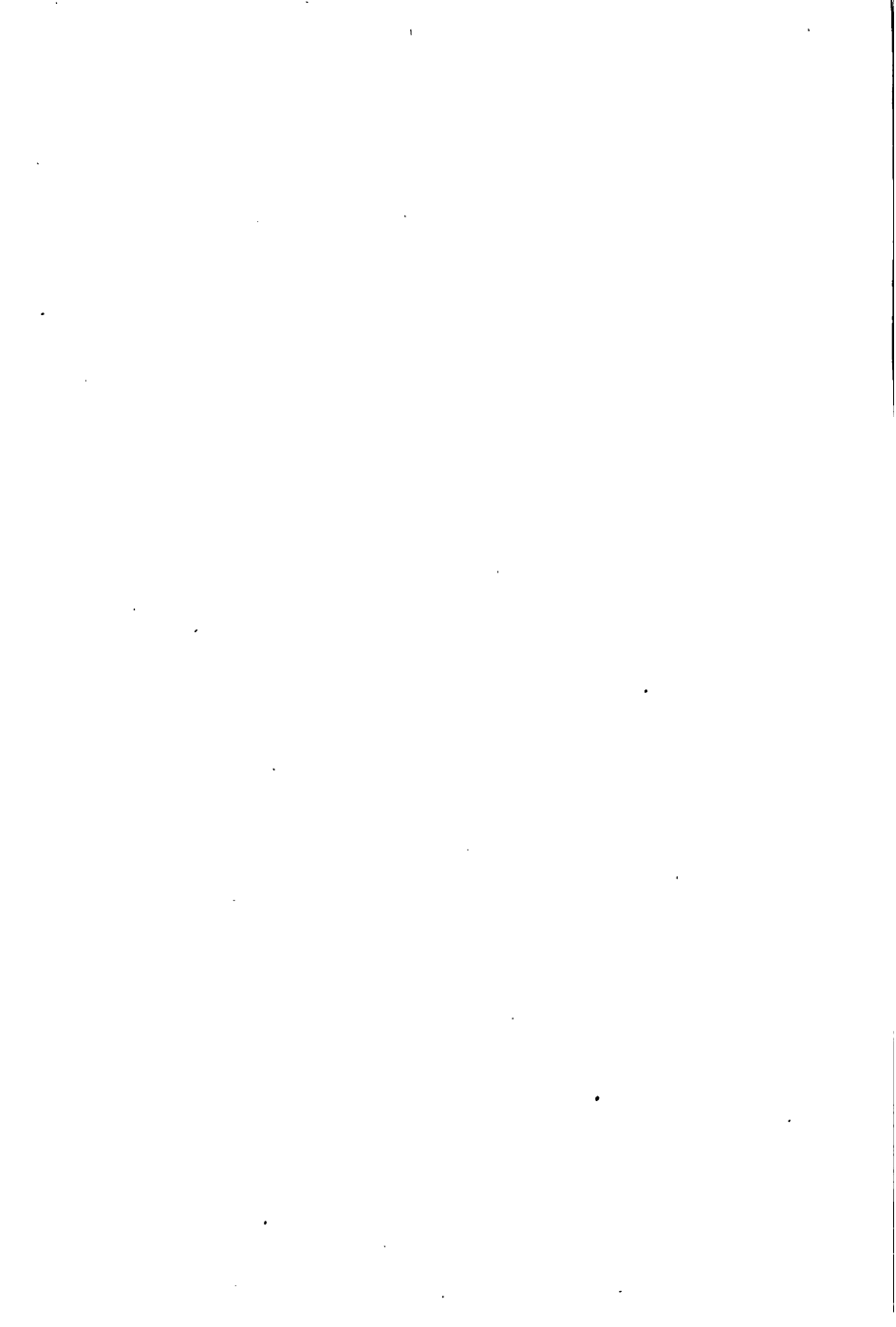
mother will abet him. Will you have any more wine?"

"One moment," I said. "I only want to ask, What has become of the borrowed Theodore?"

"He is a very fair player at Polo," replied my host. "You won't have any more wine? Then let us join Jessie and my boy on the lawn."



AN UNIMPORTANT PERSON.



AN UNIMPORTANT PERSON.

I.

CLODTHORPE is a town of Rip Van Winkles. If one of them were to go away into a cleft of the swelling hills; and come back no more, there would be but one pipe less by the inn fire. If he returned after some twenty years, there would be but one pipe more. Of course this is not true. The town is not very far from London, and the railway passes within four miles. But when you look down on Clodthorpe from some neighbouring hill, or catch a glimpse of it from the Thames, it seems so sleepy that it can hardly puff away its own blue smoke, so sleepy that you yawn pleasantly as you gaze, so sleepy that Sleep himself girdled and crowned with poppies might be sleeping there. Go into the town at noon, and, lo! it is a bustling place, and a growing. It has been growing for ages with the growth of the English people. When a Plan-

tagenet wanted a bowman, he sent to Clodthorpe. Had a Tudor wanted another playwright, he might have dug up a Shakespeare hereabout. One townsman of this goodly place would drink you three of Boreham or six of Blockley through happiness into oblivion. Of late it has grown more quickly, creeping along the country roads, rooting up hedges and pushing down elms, and so has come to Colthurst farm, and swallowed it. The meadows of deep grass, which stretch to the river-bank, are still country; but the barn is a school under clerical control; the yard, once full of straw and the smell of kine, has been swept and gravelled into a playground; and the farm-house, which stands at right angles to the barn, and likewise opens into the yard, is the suburban residence of William Whiteham, grocer, whose shop in the High Street has plate-glass windows, and whose daughter copies the London copy of the Paris fashions. Now, William Whiteham is a prudent citizen. As his new house was roomy, and his family small, he looked about for a lodger. At the same time the gentle Christopher was looking about for a lodging. Thus it came to pass that Clodthorpe, which already possessed a M.P. and a

fire-engine, each of the newest fashion, became the home of a student. The town was not moved from its accustomed calm by the coming of this contemplative person. Even the grocer's household were but slightly ruffled. All the attention which the father of the family could spare from his cheeses was given to his duty as a volunteer. The daughter scarcely looked up from her music when the young man went by. The mother, who spoke much of the increase of work, which she thoroughly enjoyed, soon absorbed her new charge, cooked for him, washed for him, mended for him, and did for him in every way. It was her care to see that he ate his meals and kept his health; and the manner of his life was the result of a compromise between his tastes and her theories. This manner of life, when it was wholly formed, was as follows: At 7.30, Jemima, maid of all work which her mistress would resign, knocked at the student's door. At 8 the attentive ear might hear him in his bath. Half an hour later he went down-stairs from his little bedroom to his little sitting-room, which was directly beneath it, and on the ground-floor. Both rooms looked into the yard. After a short pause the

lady of the house bustled across the passage with a tray, and asked after his health, while she arranged the coffee and the dish of bacon on a spotless cloth. She believed in coffee, and he could not breakfast without bacon. At 9.30 he was seated by his open window, and smoking a mild pipe. Very soon an exciting incident occurred. It happened every morning, but was always the event of the day. First one of those wide green gates which in former days let in the cows, returning heavy from pasture, was opened a little way, and a little girl slipped through. She was sent forth by a most careful mother with a little slip of something neatly bound about her shoulders, and her hair hanging in stiff curls; but when she met the student's eye, she had shaken her light locks into a tangle, held her hat by one string, and the nameless fragment by one corner. She was the naughty girl of the school; and the virtue of punctuality, which she had unexpectedly developed, had no surer foundation than a fancy for white sugar. Every morning, when she saw Christopher smoking blandly at his window, she made a face, then giggled, then went up sideways towards him, ever and anon veiling her modesty

behind a grimace. He, on his side, was very calm and still, and spake never a word. Only, when after many pauses and contortions she had drawn near, and the little hand came pushing out sideways in a furtive manner, he placed in it the largest lump and smiled. They understood each other, and there was no need for words. When she had hold of the reward of virtue, the naughty girl vanished with a directness of movement wholly unlike the previous gyrations; and presently all her small school-fellows poured into the yard, good, bad, and indifferent, prim, slipshod, or gaudy. Small bits of cheap ribbon and skim capes, suggestive of the previous existence of much larger garments, were so common as to be scarcely worthy the observation of an intellectual gentleman. And yet morning after morning the student, whose ability was undoubted, gazed on that irregular procession with unflagging interest. When the stream of girls had been some time in motion, the green gate opened wider, and a young lady walked through the yard, and entered the school-room. When she had passed, Christopher left his chair, and put away his pipe. He took down books and papers, and

began to read. At 12 he was interrupted. The school-girls were turned out for ten minutes, and their favourite pastime, which had been invented by the naughty girl, was to peep round the edge of the lodger's window, until they met his eye, when they hopped off with shrieks of laughter. Such was the sport of the younger children. The elders danced stiffly in a ring, or tossed a ball, which was never caught. The naughty one abandoned herself to riot with a reckless disregard of appearances; but for the most part the children hopped or tossed with a painfully evident regard for their silk scraps and bobtails. The play of even the smallest girls is too often constrained by a premature self-respect. Such thoughts as these often passed through the mind of the profound observer of these harmless games; but nevertheless he smiled on all alike. Sometimes the school-mistress stood in the doorway, by which a jasmine grew, and watched the children for a few minutes before she called them to work. On these occasions the student peeped at her very cautiously, lest he should drive her in. After this interruption he was apt to be restless over his book. He

fingered the paper-knife, and even bit the end. He stared at the ceiling. Sometimes he rose and paced the apartment, which was perhaps twelve feet square. Seldom had 1 o'clock sounded from the old church-tower ere he had pulled out a heap of papers of divers shapes and colours, and sharpened his pencil. This was the great unpublished tragedy: this was the student's secret. To the outer world, including the junior partner in an ambitious firm of publishers, he was a graceful scholar and an able philologist. He and he alone knew that he was a dramatist. He and he alone might view with tender eye the child of his imagination, the drama eminently Shakespearian, which he read and recited to himself, which he altered and loved. In what gorgeous scenes he moved! With what cloth-of-gold and blare of trumpets did he adorn his phantom folk! His narrow walls expanded, his low ceiling rose, until he stood by the king's chair, or mingled with courtiers prepared to chase the deer. Ladies grave and gay passed through the ancient hall, or sat in bower at the tambour-frame. Here was a cavalier of more than Spanish gravity, there a First Lord, witty and foppish as a

Frenchman. Comic retainers, full of quaint conceits and quips exceeding whimsical, carried aloft the boar's head or the peacock. Passion, pride, revenge, gaiety, extravagance, and love, breathed in the measured line. An amount of labour was expended in the effort to make this drama truly Shakespearian which would have vastly amazed the simple actor who charmed his jolly townsmen at the Globe. As the author pored over the pages, touching and retouching, polishing or roughening, the cat Hobbes, curled in her favourite chair, smiled on him with affection and contempt. When Mrs. Whiteham, followed by the faithful Jemima, descended on the apartment at 2 o'clock, bearing the dramatist's simple dinner, the peacock and boar hurried out by the window. Princes, conspirators, and prelates, men-at-arms, servitors, and knaves, fled from the shrunken room. So may Sir Walter Raleigh be driven out by his own potato. Christopher dined at 2, partly because his landlady approved of an early dinner, partly because he liked to spend the long summer evenings in the air. At 3.30 the student returned from a stroll in the yard, or down the shady road which leads riverward,

and went again to his books. Some two hours later he meditated over a tea-pot and loaf, while the cat Hobbes, with an ecstatic quiver of the tail, enjoyed a saucer of milk. Then he prepared for action. Sometimes he took a long walk among the fertile hills, following the narrow path through the wheat, listening to the mower in the grass, crossing the tiny brook by the plank. More often he sculled against the pleasant Thames. That most winsome river runs not half-a-mile from the good town of Clodthorpe, and the road which leads thereto from Colthurst farm is still lined by splendid elms. If he felt that he had done something in the day, the student, sweeping with long strokes up the stream, enjoyed a profound content which Hobbes herself, dozing at home and dreaming of the morrow's milk, might envy. From hay harvest to wheat harvest the days slip by, and the river is always friendly, always harmless, fresh for the early bather, and cool for the legs of heated cattle. Sometimes, as the sculler passed in the evening, a little breeze, waking after the slumber of the long hot day, made the wheat murmur and the stream ripple against the boat's side. When he had enough

of steady journeying, Christopher used to lie in some shy back-water, where the rare king-fisher may still be seen, a flash of blended colours ; or tied his boat to some dwarf shrub at the pasture's edge, and watched the river swell across the weir. As the sun moved down the sky, shadows of the wooded slopes lay across the rich land, the babble of the river grew more drowsy, and a hum of voices came harmonized from some far-off village, as of a simple people chanting together their evening hymn. Thus, on some Saturday night, did distance and the power of the time transform the rare remarks of happy husbandmen swilling thick beer at the pot-house into part of the chorus of praise. O fortunate labourers, if they did but know their own advantages ! The season of harvest wages is at hand, of more plentiful liquor ; and the winter and the work-house are alike far off. Moreover, they swell the pleasant sound in the ears of one gentle creature, whose ale is of the mildest. The student with beatified countenance lets slip his boat, and, floating down the darkening stream, gives himself to tender thoughts. The great folk of his tragedy do not intrude upon that quiet hour ; but some-

times two gray eyes look from the shadows, and the lisping of the waters is lost in the low voice which calls the children from their play. A light supper is the last event of the day. After that meal the book and easy chair detain their master until Mrs. Whiteham at last succeeds in sending him to bed. Thus the days go by, like a procession of sisters bearing summer gifts to Demeter. Each, as she passes, lays a cool hand on the student's brow, and smooths the sleek fur on the back of the cat Hobbes. But, alas! what quiet is secure for cat or man? One evening, as Christopher sipped his tea, and his companion lapped her milk, the green gates were burst open, quick steps scrunched the gravel of the yard, and there appeared at the window the animated and half-defiant countenance of Martin Carter.

II.

WHERE Martin Carter was there might be pleasure, there could not be rest. He had been visiting that college of Oxford where he had but lately lived as an undergraduate; and in the common-room of dons, whom he had favoured with information on subjects ranging from the Aryan worship of our ancestors to the art of ratting, there was an universal though unacknowledged feeling of relief at his abrupt departure. Yet they all liked him, save only when he had roused the spirit of opposition latent even in young dons. Calm and cultured as they were, and supremely cautious in advancing the least deniable statements, there was not one of them who had not contradicted Martin Carter directly and even rudely. Now rudeness is the one sin not to be pardoned by intellectual Oxford, and the presence of this terrible temptation was the cause of great uneasiness, while the remorse after an ebullition was almost too poignant to be borne. These collegians felt the

pricking of their hair shirts when their friend passed by. They had seen Christopher drift away from the classic air with affection and pity; they shook off Martin with affection and relief.

The student welcomed his friend with a smile of pleasure and a sigh for his lost solitude. When Mr. Carter had enlarged upon the true method of making tea, and had finished the bread and butter, he suddenly grew hot at the thought of the river, swept Christopher to the bank, chose a boat and the stroke-seat therein, and set to work with such zeal that in a moment they were hard aground. The evening's row was terrific, for the student, ever anxious to please, laboured like a slave at the oar, and the small craft flashed up the stream until it was time to dash down again. Nothing worthy of note occurred during supper-time. Afterwards, when Christopher felt more calm and had recovered his breath, he was entertained by many observations on things in general, and by some scathing criticisms on Oxford characters. "I can't stand those young dons," said Martin; "they all talk like a literary newspaper." When he had wished his friend good-night, he

came back for a last remark. "Look here," he said; "I came off in such a hurry that I brought nothing but a tooth-brush. I suppose you can lend me some things?" Christopher sleepily consented, and Martin, sweeping up an armful of clothes, retired to that repose which his friends believed impossible.

The next day was full of events. After breakfast, during which meal the new-comer, arrayed in borrowed plumes, had conducted a fiery attack on modern liberalism and the policy of *laissez faire*, Christopher went up-stairs to find a new pipe for his friend's use, and during a somewhat long search in the bed-room a revolution was effected in the parlour. He paused in the doorway very shy and open-mouthed with amazement. On the hearth-rug supremely happy sat the naughty girl. Her left hand grasped firmly a large slice of bread and jam, her right a cup of milk, while a saucer of the same harmless liquid solaced the cat Hobbes, who sat smiling at her side. Opposite to the forward child, astride on his chair and very straight in the back, sat Martin Carter. He was asking short questions and making long comments on the answers. The student, after

an awkward pause of doubt, advanced into the room, and gravely touched the little hand which held the cup. Then without a word he turned to the window and began to collect his thoughts. The infant stream was flowing by, and long before he had recovered his wonted calm he was disturbed again by the consciousness of his unusual prominence. His friend saw him blush, and jumped up just in time to see a young lady of much sweetness and simplicity pass into the school-room. "By George, sir," he cried, "that is the most charming girl I ever saw in my life!" "That is our school-mistress," observed the naughty girl, peeping between the men, and with her mouth full of the last piece of bread and jam. "You be off!" cried Martin, and hustled her out. But the child would not allow a good custom to be destroyed by a chance windfall. Careful to prevent a precedent of omission, she appeared at the window as soon as she was thrust from the door. She looked at her old friend with a roguish eye, and held out a hand yet sticky with his favourite jam. On this adhesive palm the student, who was also fond of habits, placed a lump of sugar. "That is the most extraordinary child I

ever saw," said Martin. "She explained the whole school system of this town to me in two words. I never knew anything like it—never!"

It was very hard for the gentle scholar to settle down to his work that morning. Martin pulled out half-a-dozen of his books and read discursively. Snorts of protest broke the silence of the room, contemptuous whistles, occasional exclamations of rage and hate. At last, roused to uncontrollable fury by the pompous decasyllables under which a modern philosopher veiled the plainest statement from the vulgar, he flung down the book and jumped through the window. Christopher looked up with mild surprise, and Hobbes sprang astonished on to the bookcase. During the stay of so uncertain a visitor the great drama remained under lock and key, and Martin returning found his friend still occupied with the pedigree of that important word to which he had devoted the morning. Provoked by this fact, the impulsive youth turned his back and drummed on the window-frame. At two the school-mistress passed on her way home. Martin looked at her with respectful but undisguised admiration; Christopher peeped furtively round him.

"Do you know her?" asked the former, suddenly.

"No," answered the other, doubtfully; "I suppose I don't." He felt uneasy, and wondered why. His friend had brought the morning paper, and finding that the Commons were on the point of passing a paternal act, he improved the hour of dinner by a bitter onslaught on Government interference with the liberty of the subject. Christopher, who was thinking of other things, said but little, and so increased his reputation with the ingenious Mr. Carter, who, in London, had been often heard to declare that he knew a man at Clodthorpe who was undoubtedly the first scholar and most promising philologist in the world. Nevertheless, during his visit to this prodigy, he showed no unconquerable desire for instruction.

That evening, when the two young men were on their way to the river, a strange thing happened. As they drew near to the great green gates, one of them was pushed lightly open, and the young school-mistress appeared. Perhaps it was embarrassment which caused her to stumble on the threshold. Christopher blushed, swaying forward with the desire of help and

backward with the fear of offence; but, while he swung like a disconcerted pendulum, Mr. Carter darted forward with a somewhat excessive show of alarm, and caught the little hand in the neat worn glove. "I hope you are not hurt," he said, anxiously; then, as she smiled her thanks, he went on boldly—"I did not know that we might have the pleasure of meeting you at this time."

"I had forgotten something," said the little lady, with a little blush.

"Can I be of any service?" asked he.

"Oh, no, thank you; I won't trouble you," answered she.

And so these young folk became known to each other. Then a brilliant idea occurred to the impulsive youth. "I wanted to ask you a favour," he said. "The fact is that I am vastly interested in education. Might I see the working of your school, and—in fact, ask the girls a few questions?" He saw her hesitate, and stepped lightly from imposture to falsehood. "I have heard of your school from my friend here, and came down on purpose to see it." Christopher turned scarlet as the young lady looked at him. He gasped in the presence of

this tremendous statement. "I—I——" he began. "Precisely," continued Martin; "he has not seen it himself, but has heard much of it from Mrs. Whitewhatshername—his landlady, you know." Now this small teacher was not free from pride; she believed in her system, and thought it possible that the great minds of the metropolis were occupied among graver matters with the consideration of her school. She therefore informed the volunteer inspector, with infinite condescension, that she would be happy to receive him on the morrow at noon.

"How could you say that you came to see her school?" asked Christopher, as they went down the shady road. "Diplomacy!" cried the other, curtly. "It is very like lying," muttered the student. Martin was terribly vigorous on the river, perhaps doing penance. There was an absence of dash about Christopher.

III.

THE next morning at breakfast Mr. Carter entertained his friend by a passionate eulogy on the English Church. "By George, sir!" he exclaimed, in the course of his remarks, "we call ourselves enlightened, and talk rational religion, like the wretched prigs we are. Why, there is not a fellow going about in a high waistcoat who is not worth the whole pack of us! Look at their charity and their energy!" The cat Hobbes, who hated enthusiasm, turned on the rug and looked the other way. Christopher made no defence. Indeed, he spoke but little, having an uneasy feeling that his friend was watching him, even when he expressed agreement, eager as a terrier and ready to be at him again when his last word was half uttered. Martin had a look which said as plainly as speech, "Yes, yes, precisely; only do let me go on." But if the student was silent on this

occasion, he thought the more, and it did not escape him that he was confronted by his own best suit of clothes. For some reason it was annoying that his new waistcoat should assist at the examination of the school-girls. His guest had abandoned all hope of his portman-teau, boldly expressing his belief that the venerable and benevolent head of his College, who was suspected of a well-regulated sympathy with Socialism, had appropriated the garments. The student's work was much interrupted on this eventful morning—partly by his own perverse imagination, which pictured to him the scene so soon to be enacted in the school-room; partly by the growing uneasiness of the examiner, who, as the hour approached, lashed himself into a fever of excitement, until he ramped round the room like a caged lion. At last the dreaded moment arrived. The playful children after their brief holiday had been again gathered into the room. Martin, with an air of defiance almost piratical, but with heart beating under Christopher's waistcoat twice as fast as heart had ever beaten there before, crossed the yard to the doorway, where the little teacher awaited him with admirable

self-control. The student, peeping shyly from the window, saw a pretty picture framed in oak. In honour of the occasion, or on account of the heat, the young lady had donned a white gown, which fell in unadorned purity from her firm round chin to her small feet. The sun, pushing lazily through a neighbouring elm, relieved this almost affected simplicity by a fanciful pattern of light shadows. Her wide hat, which for all its Quaker-like demureness was not unbecoming, had been laid aside, and the brown hair, which rippled in defiance of a puritanical brush, was touched by the broken light to gold. Prim but pretty, shy but confident in herself, a little angel of Fra Angelico made woman by the pencil of Raphael, a kitten who would wet her feet on a charitable errand, she was careful to keep her petticoats from mud and her soul from sin. With a respect for the Church of England before the Reformation, and a taste for pretty symbols as an aid to devotion, she combined the personal simplicity of a Quaker, and such breadth of religious sympathy that she could discern the germs of faith in the quaint observances of a cannibal. Had there been more to know, there had been more

to praise her. Yet to paint such a lily were to spoil her; the violet has its own sweet perfume, and some gold is refined though far away from London. She was a good girl, as all men and many women would allow. She was not occupied with these thoughts of herself as she greeted the examiner with a frank smile, which raised his courage, and a keen glance, which sent it into his boots and made his feet waver. Mr. Carter was surprised and maddened by his own cowardice. In the effort to subdue his panic he glared upon the assembled girls with a glare so awful that the smallest one burst into loud lamentations and had to be walked about outside by her sister. The examiner, who was not encouraged by this success, grew pale as he found himself confronted by a long row of the older pupils, who were ready to answer historical questions. The difficult thing was to ask them. A young man may be bold, but a new experience combined with a consciousness of imposture will loosen the stiffest knees. Fragments of botany, geology, geography, philology, physiology, psychology, and several sciences of more recent date, crowded confusedly into the mind of the adventurous youth. As

for history, the only thing he could think of was the statement of some bold thinker that it was better to know the history of a piece of chalk than that of the entire human race. Ages seemed to elapse, and then, painfully conscious of the eyes of the school-mistress, he gasped out the question, "Who was Alexander?" "Please, sir, a coppersmith," said the first girl. "Oh, no, he was not," cried the examiner, much elated. "She means Alexander the coppersmith," whispered the young lady, and added hastily, "They don't do ancient history." "Oh! ah! exactly," assented the unhappy youth, and on the inspiration of the moment blurted out, "Who was Magna Charta?" There was a titter from the three head girls, which set the whole school laughing. Martin shuddered. It seemed to him that no event worthy of note had happened since the battle of Arbela. He derived a dismal consolation from the thought that his shame would be probably forgotten some time in the next century. The school-mistress looked at him strangely. This girl, who had seemed so slight a thing when she stumbled in the yard, was truly awful in her own demesne. His eye wandered down the row of girls as he strove to

shape a question and wondered how it would sound. Then an awful thing happened. As his glance rested on the last girl of the line, and he was about to speak, a voice proceeding from a distant corner broke the stillness of the room. Fearfully distinct, uttered in an infantine imitation of his own tone and manner, these words sounded in his ear—"By George, sir, that is the most charming girl I ever saw in my life!" A pause of astonishment was followed by a burst of laughter from the whole school. Quick as lightning the teacher summoned the delinquent, who even from the corner of punishment had committed a new offence. But Martin dared not face the naughty one. If she should explain her words! He muttered something about the heat, pardon, sunstroke, and dashed at the door. But his agony was not yet at an end. On the threshold he ran against the tall figure of a man, who was stooping in the doorway, and fell feebly against the wall. "I beg ten thousand pardons," said the new-comer, with a courteous motion of the hands, and a voice soft but studiously distinct. He spoke with a careful pronunciation of each syllable, like an accomplished foreigner. Indeed, the Rev. Giles

Warner prided himself on his resemblance to a French priest of the best type, and his incisive speech was not only effective in the pulpit, but in admirable harmony with his dark thin face and the deep blue of his shorn cheek and chin. In spite of his extreme urbanity, there was a twinkle in his deep-set eye as he looked at the embarrassed youth and quickly suppressed admonition in the glance which he turned on the young teacher. That lady caught the fleeting expression, and resented it. She therefore advanced with surprising friendliness to the baffled examiner, and astonished him by her thanks for his good intentions, and her hopes for his speedy recovery. He replied by a look sufficiently comical, which was meant to express abject humility and boundless gratitude. Then he got out of the place, and did not pause until he was under lock and key in his own bed-room. For half an hour he gave himself up to sorrow and shame. Then other thoughts gradually crept in, each link of the chain brighter than the last. Perhaps the naughty girl would not be questioned about her mysterious observation. If she were questioned, she would not be believed. If she were believed—why (here he

took a bold leap), so much the better! No woman could be really angry with a man for saying that she was charming. She would blush, declare to herself that she was furious, and smile. He could see her smile. (Here he lapsed into a dream of her excellence.) She had been kind to him. She certainly liked him. Perhaps she would learn to love him. She loved him. Here Christopher called him to dinner, and he descended full of confidence. Indeed, he strutted before his friend like a victorious bantam, or a heroic tenor who has donned the basso's gown to gain admittance to the light soprano. He did not describe the examination in detail, but talked fluently on subjects of more general interest. Only when Christopher spoke of the appearance of the High-Church parson in their quiet yard did he show signs of care. He could not disguise from himself the danger which threatened not only Clodthorpe, but England, he might say Europe, nay, the world. Every part of the Continent was undermined by Jesuit plots, and the High-Church party in this country were ignorantly and pitifully playing the game of Rome. "Don't talk to me, sir," he cried to the student, whose mouth was full

of mutton, "about the progress of liberal ideas. We shall talk our twopenny toleration until we wake up in the Vatican. Before the end of the century every Government in both hemispheres will be but viceroys of the Pope, and we, whom the sea might keep apart, will be drawn to his chair at the skirts of these long-coated Ritualists." If Martin took a melancholy view of the prospects of mankind at dinner-time, it was bright to the doom which he foresaw a few hours later. He declined to go on the water, and Christopher, floating on the stream, surrendered himself to meditation, which was melancholy but not unpleasant. When his slow feet brought him back through the deepening-gloom to the green gates, he found his friend nursing a fury by the wayside. Seized by the coat and dragged into the yard, he was confronted by this wild young man, who hissed in his ear, "What do you think? That girl—that charming girl—is a member of a sisterhood!" The rage and scorn with which he emphasized the obnoxious word were awful.

"I knew it," said Christopher, meekly.

"Then I give you up," cried Martin, and, suiting the action to the word, he dashed into

his friend's room, flung himself into his chair, and sat on his cat. The cat Hobbes, who was awakened from a delicious dream of cream, dashed out with an amazing splutter. During the sojourn of this excited stranger her life was a series of rude shocks. She was partly consoled by the appearance of supper. It was a supper good for cats and men. Under its benign influence the world grew brighter. When it had vanished, and the drowsy perfume of fresh tobacco was stealing through the room, the troubled spirit of Mr. Carter was soothed. After much silent smoking, he broke the meditation of his friend by observing that after all there was something beautiful in the association of gentle women for good works. This led to some remarks on the religion of women, and its excellence when it nourished a wide human sympathy instead of an unnatural celibacy.

"It is," he said, "in a Protestant nunnery that a sufferer may find the kindest sister, a worker the most helpful wife."

As the two young men were going up-stairs to bed, Martin suddenly grasped Christopher by the hand, wrung it to the verge of pain, and

cried, "My dear fellow, you don't know what I owe you !"

"No, I don't," said the other, almost moodily.

"I feel as if it would be all right," proclaimed the enthusiast, with flashing eyes ; "I can't tell why. I felt almost melancholy this afternoon. It is rather inconsistent."

This was one of his rare moments of illumination. When this impatient spirit had long been lulled to rest, Christopher still sat by his window looking at the stars.

IV.

So the summer days went slowly by like bees laden with sweetness. Of many such days no record will be given. If anybody should read the previous chapters, he or she will be glad to pass lightly on from bath and bacon to supper and sleep, and again from supper and sleep, through star-gazing watches, to bath and bacon. Clodthorpe is a very dull town, and hundreds of less eventful histories might be written of its inhabitants. It is a solemn thought. The time, over which we pass, was a time of rare beauty. It was warm summer, but not parched and bare; for still rain fell in the nights, and, lo ! in the morning the country had renewed her spring. But melancholy comes with the riches of the year, and together they had come to Christopher. His life was no longer solitary, nor spent among the splendours and intrigues of a phantom and highly artificial society. In the

place of daring page and scheming prelate were Martin Carter and the Rev. Giles Warner; for court ladies, school-girls gathered round Hermione Dale, before whose eyes the proud princess was fading. There was also a duenna. Miss Anne Winch was that sister of the sisterhood whose mission was the repulse of the other sex. When Sister Hermione became acquainted with two young men, Sister Anne rose between her and danger, as in obedience to natural laws, soft and strong as a sand-bank, against which the light artillery of dashing Mr. Carter might thunder in vain. Meanwhile the little school-mistress, though she resented the presence of her placid dragon as wholly unnecessary, was very happy. Perhaps from her knowledge of the character of the naughty girl, aided by her feminine intuition of such matters, she had inferred Martin's admiration of herself. It is certain that his ardour and his ready talk were to her a new and delightful experience. Brought up between four walls, and among women more or less weak, she had long felt herself immeasurably wiser than her acquaintances. She knew as well what Susan or Tabitha would do at each slight variation of circumstances as if one were

an acid and the other an alkali. If the one always took cream before sugar, was not the other equally consistent in taking sugar before cream? Even in dull Clodthorpe could be found no duller folk than Tabitha and Susan. Debarred from the noblest study of mankind, Hermione took to theology, and made her books an excuse for solitude. She worked archaic samplers also, and strange garments for singers. She loitered among the flowers, making a pretty picture, and fancying herself a scientific gardener. Had she not gained a real interest in her small scholars, she would have led a sham life, playing the nun, musing over her religious emotions, and believing, except in some painful moments of self-knowledge, that she was a very superior woman. In fact, this charming girl was half a prig, when she was affected by the new influence of her erratic adorer; for adorer he was, as Christopher knew. If the ardent and sometimes brilliant talk of the young man was pleasant to the thirsty mind of the young woman, her cool judgment and intuition of right and wrong were inexpressibly delightful to his wayward character. After the first week of their acquaintance he was as ready to accept her decision on all

practical matters as she was to give it; and it is worthy of remark that having once accepted it he very rarely maintained the opposite. Christopher confessed to himself that his friend became more steady. Even his vague religiosity was being concentrated by Miss Dale's occasional precepts into a qualified support of the church of the Rev. Giles Warner. As to the priest himself, Martin soon maintained that his influence with the poor was greater than that of any man since Wesley. There was a strange combination of Ritualist and Methodist in the man who was the theological adviser of Sister Hermione. He was fond of colour and processions, but somewhat lax as to forms. He had barely escaped persecution for his love of the illegal candle; he had roused the envy of a travelling revivalist by capping his most popular prayer with a better. He was very attentive to Mr. Carter, combating his opinions as if they were vastly important. Now flattery cannot be administered by an older to a younger man in a more delicate and effective form; and in this case it extracted from the youth his views on all subjects divine and human. The priest, in return, made himself agreeable by small favours. Now

he displayed an interesting family of the poor and honest ; now he dropped an exquisite fragment of mediæval legend. Now he showed the open working of a stimulating charity ; and anon suggested the existence of a proselytizing society. It was strange that a man so full of good works should give so much time to an impulsive and erratic young man, though Martin did not think so. Yet he was mightily pleased by this clerical condescension, and when he found himself at the hour of evensong in his friend's company and close to St. Polycarp's, he seldom refused to enter. The church was brilliantly lighted to attract the class to whom light is a luxury, and warmly coloured for the pleasure of uneducated senses. There Martin Carter would stand amid the natives of the surrounding slums, and at the end of the service thunder out hymn after hymn, while the congregation were roused to fresh exertions by their friendly pastor. Martin had a big bass voice, and liked to hear it.

So the friendship between the clergyman and the layman grew side by side with the love of the youth for the maiden, until one day a remarkable conversation took place. The Rev.

Giles Warner invited his friend to walk, and the two set forth together. It was evening, but still hot, and they chose the shady hollows of the easy hills. At the first pause in Martin's talk the priest made a remark. "What a charming young lady Miss Dale is!" he said. This set the other off again. When he had exhausted all the terms of praise in the English language, Mr. Warner quietly expressed his agreement. "Quite so," he said, and added, in a meditative manner, "It is very unfortunate that she should be alone in the world, and so poor in worldly wealth. She is well fitted for the command of money."

"Why?" asked his companion, sharply.

"She has so much sense and so much goodness. She might be of infinite service."

Upon this the younger man burst forth in indignant comment, maintaining, with much passion and volubility, that a woman's sense and virtue are the very qualities which make her a good wife for a poor man. When he paused for breath, the priest, smiling gently and shaking his head, observed; "Very true; but if the good and wise woman be rich also, she may benefit not one man, but a thousand. There is great power in money."

This talk was as the converse of whip and top. The whip gave a cut, and off went the top for a long spin. It spun buzzing against riches. Rich men care for nothing but to grow more rich. Their charity is ostentation, and generally harmful. It is the poor who help the poor. So may these buzzings be compressed. The youth was by this time too excited to remark that his companion was watching him narrowly, almost eagerly.

"Why," he cried, presently, yielding half consciously to his tendency to present himself as an illustration, "I might be a rich man if I chose."

"Indeed!" questioned the priest, with a smile, in which there was just enough of doubt to goad the young man into further revelations.

"I suppose I may say so. I am the only near relative of my uncle, who made a pile of money, and owns a big place in Hampshire."

"Is it possible," asked the other, seemingly much surprised, "that you are related to the great Sir Abraham Carter?"

"Ex-mayor, inventor and patentee of the Cantharic stain-eradicator, at 6d. the stick, J.P., country gentleman, and Tory M.P.," cried Mar-

tin, laughing bitterly, and emphasizing each title with his stick.

"And you are not on good terms?" asked the other, in a tone of real concern. "Pardon me," he added, quickly, "if I overstep——"

"Oh, not at all," said Martin. "If to be turned out of the house is a sign of displeasure and a cause of annoyance, I may say that we are not on good terms. He disapproved of my advising the application of the patent eradicator to his own reputation."

"How very unfortunate! But the place? Perhaps the place is entailed upon you?"

"No; he has everything in his own hands. You see I was not wrong in saying that I might be rich. I have but to go humbly to my uncle the eradicator, and I am heir to his ill-gotten gains."

"Wealth ill gained may be sanctified by its use," suggested the priest.

"That is a damnable doctrine," cried the layman, hotly; "I beg your pardon, but it is."

"Well, well," said the other, soothingly; "then there is no hope of Sir Abraham pardoning you?"

"None. The truth is that I incidentally showed him up in print. I referred to him as an

example of successful fraud, and he did not like it."

"Not unnaturally. You write for the press? How did he know that it was your article?"

"I signed it. It was in the 'Bi-monthly,'" said Martin, naming a periodical famous for plain speaking. One of his friends asserted that Martin wrote for the 'Bi-monthly' because he could pour out as much abuse as he chose, and sign his name in full at the bottom of it. One of his enemies refused to answer an attack on the ground that Martin Carter would any day rather be kicked down-stairs than not noticed.

"The 'Bi-monthly,'" repeated the Rev. Giles Warner, musing; "a very interesting periodical—very; but not, I fear, a mine of wealth for the contributors."

"I have something of my own," said the young man, carelessly; "four or five hundred a-year."

"And you have attacked your rich uncle in the 'Bi-monthly?' Well, well, you young men are very bold. I fear we must part here, and, by-the-bye, perhaps for some time. I start for another conference this evening."

"A conference? Where? What about?"

asked the youth, who was interested in everything.

"On ecclesiastical affairs. Good-bye till we meet again. Good-bye, good-bye." With an affectionate pressure of the hand, and some contempt and pity in his heart, the Rev. Giles Warner left his friend, and passed quickly into St. Polycarp's.

Martin went home feeling rather cross. He wondered why he had been so egotistical. A man always feels the vanity of the world when he has talked more than is his wont about himself. He had an uneasy impression that he had been posturing before his friend.

The next morning Mr. Carter, having recovered from his unusual fit of self-distrust, was watching the customary stream of small folk who passed the window. Presently the green gate opened in a manner which showed the decision of an adult. The young man turned quickly, and with a bright smile of welcome. This pleasant expression yielded to a look of profound dismay as the gate was sharply closed and he found himself confronted by the inexpressive countenance of Miss Anne Winch.

V.

Now were the summer days most waspish, and each in passing left her sting in Martin Carter. He could hear nothing of Hermione Dale. At first he was energetic and confident. He dashed from place to place asking questions. At the clergy-house he learned that the Rev. Giles Warner was exercising his persuasive faculty at a congress in Germany, and was too busy for private correspondence. To the dwelling of the sisterhood, which he haunted, he could never gain admittance. He lay in wait for the sisters, and captured in succession the prudent Tabitha and the homely Susan. From the former he extracted the information that Hermione was with friends in London; from the latter that there was no particular address. He made a sudden onslaught on Miss Anne Winch; but that least impressionable of women listened patiently for half-an-hour, and

said nothing but good-bye. Then energy and confidence gave way to irritability and hope, and these in turn yielded to despair and loss of appetite. One morning, as Christopher watched his friend sitting moody before his coffee, and playing with his bacon, he was attacked by a most disturbing thought. It flashed across him that perhaps he might do something to help the sufferer. Now a mood of passive pity was not unpleasant to the student, but the idea of active help in the matter was singularly distasteful. He put it away from him, and buried himself in his books; but to no purpose. That thought was everywhere. When he looked down, he read it between the lines; when he looked up, he saw it on the wall. Instead of a profound work on particles, his book might have been an essay on the duties of friendship. By dinner-time he had almost yielded, and had hit upon the secondary and more comfortable consideration that he should certainly fail. During the meal his friend's silence seemed portentous. It was as if the mill-stream had ceased to turn the wheel, and the waking miller heard for the first time silence. When dinner was over, the student,

as he was wont to do, strolled into the shady road; but at the hour of return to study he had his hand on the bell of the tall house where the sisters lived. So he stood for a minute, then took his hand away, and went towards the river. He walked slowly to the bank, and turned up stream. The river with its great gentleness and little changes was always a good friend to the student. It soothed him in his hours of leisure, and helped him when he wished to think. It seemed as if under the pleasant tone of the water his scattered thoughts and feelings drew together without his effort and formed a purpose for him. The Thames was ever ready to tell him the right thing to do. When he had been walking for some time, he flung himself, face downwards, where the grass was cool, about an old tree and a tangled hedge, and lay thinking. He thought of many things more or less irrelevant, such as his earliest recollections of his mother, Rosalind in forest air, a beetle all in green and gold who pushed through a tuft to look at him, the twitter of a bird above his head; and yet, when he had lain very still for an hour, he rose with a set purpose. When the

small twittering bird hopped down to pry into the place where the strange visitor's face had been, she found her breast wet with unaccustomed dew. Christopher walked quietly down the river, quietly up the road, and rang the clanging bell of the gaunt house without a pause. In the door was a grating, of which these amateur nuns were mightily proud. Christopher, who was looking at the grating in expectation of the critical face of a subordinate sister, was much surprised to see two small brown hands grasp the bars. Presently between the hands rose the comical face of the naughty girl with twice its usual amount of mischief. "I thought it was you. I saw you in the road," she whispered, and disappeared. In a moment she opened the door, and pulled the young man in by the sleeve. "Hush! come on," she said.

"But what are you doing here?" he asked, hanging back.

"Oh, I am here because I am so naughty. Come on, do."

"But I want to see Miss Winch."

"Well, I'll take you. She is in the lockatory."

"In the what?"

"In the lockatory. That's what they like to call it."

"Oh! the locutory! The parlour, eh?"

"Yes. Come on. I'll take you in. Only don't you go till I come back." With this warning the naughty girl pushed open a door in the passage, pushed Christopher towards it, and ran off on tip-toe. The young man entered the room, and found himself in the presence of Miss Anne Winch. Even this imperturbable woman was surprised.

"How did you get in?" she asked.

"I am so glad to find you at home," said he. She looked as if the pleasure was not mutual.

"May I ask for news of Miss Dale?" he inquired, after an interval.

"Hermione is better, thank you."

"She has been ill?"

"Not seriously."

It was a remarkable conversation. Neither was a fluent talker. The longest and indeed the most eloquent part of the dialogue were the pauses. Christopher stared at his boot, and Miss Winch took up her work. Presently he asked, "Have you heard from her lately?"

She thought awhile before she answered.

"We have the latest news of her."

Here ensued a pause of unusual length. The lady moved in her chair, and directed at the gentleman that feminine look which insinuates without rudeness that a visit has been long enough. But Christopher sat still, mindful of the orders of the eccentric child, and having a great power of waiting. At last he asked, "When do you expect her back?"

"May I ask your reason for wishing to know?"

"I want to speak to her on a matter of importance."

The lady settled herself more firmly in her chair, and in her blindest voice observed, "Our dear Hermione is almost alone in the world. We could hardly permit the visits of a young man without an explanation."

"I wish that I could give you one. But there is another to be considered."

"You come on behalf of somebody else?" asked Miss Winch, almost betraying interest.

"I come on my own responsibility."

"And you cannot tell me your reason?"

"I fear not."

"Then," said Miss Anne Winch, slowly, "I fear that we shall gain nothing by prolonging this interview."

The situation was embarrassing for Christopher. To avoid moving he was forced to shut his eyes to the fact that she had half risen from her chair. But he was bent on delay. He sat still and meditated. Presently he resumed the conversation by saying, "You will pardon me for asking if you are Miss Dale's guardian?"

"In some sort, yes."

"I mean in the eye of the law."

"Now you must pardon me in turn. You cannot expect a woman to understand the law."

Christopher rubbed his hat, pushed out one leg, and looked carefully at his foot, wondering what he should say next. After a pause Miss Winch rose, and said, still with much urbanity, "I must ask you to excuse me. It is a very busy day with us." The young man rose slowly, conscious and half ashamed of his feeling of relief. He had done his best, and failed.

"I am sorry to have troubled you," he said. "Good-day;"—and he moved towards the door. But he had not made two steps in that direction when the door opened, and he started back in

surprise. On the threshold stood Hermione Dale, rather pale, but calm. Christopher looked round at Miss Winch, probably with something of rebuke in his eyes, for she said quietly, "Did not you know that Hermione was in the house?" But though her voice was urbane as ever, there was a world of meaning in the glance which she turned on the little sister. Even at this crisis Miss Dale did not forget the dignity of the school-mistress. She delivered her commands to the naughty girl, who stood in great glee behind her, before she advanced alone into the room. She held out her hand frankly to Christopher, and looked at Sister Anne with an unmistakable expression. "Oh, certainly, if you wish it," said that lady, and left the room.

Then the student quietly and gravely pleaded the cause of another. He praised Martin's generosity, his brilliancy, his kind heart. He stated his own conviction that an able woman could concentrate and strengthen all that was good in him. He soon saw that he might finish his panegyric. Her face grew softer, and her eyes were moistened, as she heard him.

"I have no right to speak," he said, abruptly ;
"but I saw how wretched he was. You will

cure him? " he asked, with a sort of sob in his voice, and a foreknowledge of her answer, which made him smile grimly.

"Why did he not come?" she asked, softly.

"He has been twenty times, but he never could get in."

"And yet you thought they would admit you?" she asked, half smiling.

"Yes. I am an unimportant sort of person."

They had some further talk. Christopher learned that Hermione had been really unwell, and had been in London for a few days. On her return she found that her place at the school had been taken by Miss Winch, and that the Rev. Giles Warner had left for her a large mass of papers, with a request that they might be copied, and forwarded to him in Germany. She had been very busy, and a little surprised to hear nothing of her friends, until the naughty girl told her that one of them was in the house. Neither the young lady nor the student spoke much of the future; but before they parted he knew that she would walk by the river that evening.

That evening Martin also walked by the river. The Thames has heard many love-stories

as he loiters on his way. He is bound for the sea, but has time for many little works and pastimes. He winds idly through the level fields, stopping in full contentment at the lock gates, or sliding with low laughter across the weir. He lingers where the great trees drop boughs towards the stream, or in dense masses climb the steep slopes. He swerves about the green islands lovingly, and lifts the long grasses at their edge. He explores shadowed backwaters, softly raises the water-lilies, and swells against the swan's breast among the reeds. As he sings the richness of the year, many little birds weave variations in the monotonous tune. Over the osier beds the cloud of starlings breaks into falling birds, and the air is full of gossip and household chatter. The sun, when he sinks in splendour, keeps his deepest colours for the tranquil Thames. Amid the gathering shadows two silver swans ride purely. O Edmund Spenser, worthy poet of this sweet English river, thou hast left a marriage-song for all true lovers.

When Miss Hermione Dale saw the shadows deepening, she did not think of Spenser. She thought that Martin, who was looking worn

and harassed, maugre his present joy, would catch cold. Therefore, with that deception which we pardon in affectionate women, she said that she felt the air grow chill, and shivered ; and there-upon Mr. Carter, glowing with the new delight of taking care of a weaker creature, hurried her home. Before they parted, by the clanging bell of the gaunt house, it was agreed between these lovers that he should take her next day to her friends in London, return himself to his bachelor lodgings in the same city, and, as soon as might be, buy the ring. That night the joy of Martin Carter broke forth in cries of astonishment and sudden movements, most disturbing to the cat Hobbes. When his friend was at last asleep, Christopher sat long leaning out into the night, meditating on life and love. Great is the effect of solemn beauty on a tender soul. When he drew in his head, his face was wet with tears.

VI.

THE next morning, when Martin and Hermione were flying to London together, Christopher sat at breakfast alone. For half-an-hour after that meal he smoked a mild pipe. Then he saw the naughty girl, who held out the accustomed hand. When he placed the largest lump in her small palm, she did not make a face for answer, but smiled and thanked him. It seemed pathetic to the student that she should smile and speak to him on that morning. Presently the cat Hobbes rubbed herself against his leg from the extremity of her left ear to the point of her stiff tail. It seemed pathetic that the cat Hobbes, who was not by nature demonstrative, should favour him with such prolonged expression of goodwill. And now the stream of children flowed by him, and in the stream like a long log trundled edgeways came Miss Anne Winch, who

did not see him, as at the moment she was encouraging the smallest girl with the point of her parasol. At ten the student took down his books. After the children's frolic at noon he showed signs of restlessness. He went to the cupboard, and fished out the long-neglected tragedy. He pushed over the papers until he came to the great love-scene. It was at court that the grand passion was displayed. Out stepped his princess all in gems and gold. In rushed his page in kirtle green. She was in splendour like the sun, as he told her. His garb was mean, as he exclaimed with bitterness, but none the less becoming. Yet fine as it all was, it seemed a poor thing to the author. Was it possible that his great work was so very unnatural? Were the jewels so glassy, and the page's legs mere padding? It was the wooing of the Albert Memorial by a German band. O fine writing, and scenes of admirable proportion, are ye no warmer than a painted fire? Let Romeo climb the wall, or Juliet lean from the window, and how many pairs of lovers flit away like ghosts! Away with them all, these creatures cut out of books, manufactured rags, shadows of shadows! Out with them, O

Christopher grown clear-eyed, proud monarch and despised suitor, alike despicable! snip off the head of this maiden, who doles out a measured passion with her painted lips! What do these speech-makers know of love?

The student took out the fatal shears, and very quietly cut the great drama into little pieces. He dined with a fair appetite. In the evening, as his boat drifted slowly down the river, he was surprised to find how calm he felt. The air was above all things sweet. There was rest in the thought of Martin Carter a long way off. It was almost a relief to remember that Hermione was no longer behind the clanging bell. There was melancholy pleasure in the knowledge that the First and Second Gentlemen had walked away never to return. He debated with himself whether on the morrow he should begin his essay on Euripides, or his criticism of the criticism of the newest and deepest German. As he passed onward, he took out a canvas bag full of minute scraps of paper, added a stone to the contents, and dropped it into the water. The stream closed silently over it, and the gentle critic floated home.

JOHN'S HERO.

JOHN'S HERO.

I.

THE book in which you take so warm an interest is a mere work of fiction ; and yet, as you judiciously observe, it is one without which no gentleman's library is complete. You ask who wrote it. You will be surprised to hear that it was produced by two authors. One of these is a man of world-wide reputation. The Japanese student has adopted him with the graceful costume of English civilization, and his name is misspelled by the Parisian journalist. The other author is comparatively unknown : he is my friend, and his Christian name is John.

Tom, Dick, Harry, John, and I were some few years ago a set at an Oxford college. Widely different in character, we had each his friends outside the little circle ; but we five were bound most closely together by the memory of bright

days of boyhood and of comical scrapes enjoyed by all together. But enough of this. We have left Oxford, and the old ties are loosened. Each has found for himself an absorbing occupation, and our intimacy has in some cases dwindled to a mere grunt in the street. The sagacious Tom is already a rising lawyer, and has lost his colour. The graceful Dick offers incense at the shrine of art, draws daily longer limbs of sadder women, and has already painted ten thousand sun-flowers. Harry, our golden youth, whose Pactolus flows foaming from the paternal vats, walks with stiff legs in the park, and dances with bent knees in the ball-room. When in London he has his flowers from the country; when in the country, from Covent Garden. He plays his hockey on horseback, and does his skating on wheels; keeps a yacht in the harbour, and a stud in the stable; pays for one theatre, and goes every night to another; —in short, sees life, and is as bored by the sight as if he were not the grandson of a jovial tapster. Henry, Richard, and Thomas, friends of my youth, you have gone from me! Indeed I have no time to cultivate you farther, for I have an engrossing occupation too. My whole time and my whole attention are given

to the study and to the encouragement of John. John is the most remarkable young man of the age. Indeed he is too great for an age in which the division of labour is carried to excess. Tom delights in law ; but how could John, with extended vision and impatient genius, limit himself to the composition of jargon for a conveyancer ? Dick revels gracefully in art ; but how should John be content with a reputation for painting the sunny side of sheep ? And indeed it seems likely that, as the great banker yields to the joint-stock company, so will the great artist be superseded by a union of the small, and a single canvas will display Mr. Hobson's unrivalled cows reclining beneath the world-renowned elms of Mr. Thompson, while the stream duly patented by Mr. Jackson runs through the inimitable meadow of Mr. Harrison, and Mr. Robinson's famous young lady in short-waisted white muslin treads the unpretending daisy of the modest Mr. Dixon. So is it with other professions. If it has been once admitted that an actor can play an old Frenchman, the world will have none of his young Frenchman nor of his old Englishman. He may play the Dutchman all his life and make a fortune thereby, but

people won't be bothered by his German, however near the border. Finally, the man of letters, if he have a reputation for the knowledge of butter, will have his essay on cream returned to him with a civil note from his publisher. In such a world what place is there for John? He cannot be content to invent a machine for fixing the wire on corks. To make wire, cork, bottle, and explosive liquor, would scarce be work enough for him. He is a giant in an age of clever pigmies, and should have stood by the great Leonardo wielding the chisel, the brush, and the pen, or played a whole orchestra of instruments while he planned a fort or a cathedral. To the sound of music the slender arches spring to the high point of meeting; the marble floor spreads wide and white below; and the great church, broad for all men and yearning up to God, stands a meet symbol for my friend. Is it strange that I should find the work of my life in watching, encouraging, and hoping for him? But I grow tedious, as I always do when I embark on this subject. I must to my story.

One evening I received a note from John, who begged me to come to him the next morning before breakfast. I am not an early riser; but

I refuse my friend nothing. I found him alone, in the simply-furnished den which opens out of his bed-room on the third floor of a street which you must forgive me for not naming. It was a cold, bright morning, and yet I found my friend leaning on his elbows at the open window. A pang of fear shot through me: all, even the most perfect characters, have one weak point: I was certain that John loved. The worst sign was that he remained unconscious of my presence. With a sensation of sickness I foresaw the future, and myself without an occupation. I saw him in a suburban villa and the odour of respectability, owner of a dining-room with a sideboard, a wife with a milliner, a coach-house with a perambulator. Could I find interest in watching him, as he bent all his great powers to the acquisition of a Victoria instead of the chariot of fame? I sighed; and John, at last conscious of my presence, seized me by the arm, and, drawing me hastily to the window, bade me look. I was dizzy, and could scarcely see. I drew my hand across my eyes, expectant of the picture of a young girl watering her mignonette. I have read of such things in books, and I

looked for that air of innocent unconsciousness of male observation which is dear to the sentimental novelist and characteristic of the more charming sex. How different a sight met my eyes when they had recovered their wonted powers!

On the second floor of the opposite house was a window, of which the lower part was covered by a muslin blind: above this blind appeared a broad fat shoulder; and the shoulder was undoubtedly masculine. Across its ample surface a rough towel was passing and repassing with wonderful celerity.

"That shoulder," said John, solemnly, "supports the best head in England, the head of Mr. Damon."

"But what is he doing?" I asked.

"He is promoting his circulation."

"After his bath, I suppose?"

"I can't say," answered John; "but every morning at or about this hour I observe the rub."

"And yet he is a hero in your eyes!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," said he, and his fine eyes flashed; "if I were to see his statue in an aquarium, he would

still be my hero. He is the man for whom I have been waiting—a man of the most varied talents, of balanced conduct, of perfect culture. I am going to sit at his feet.”

“Then I can’t go on sitting at yours,” cried I, in some perturbation.

“I can teach nothing,” said he; “but,” he added, in a tone of deep feeling, “I am going to learn.”

“Do you know him?” I asked.

“No; but I shall in less than two hours. I am going to him, as one can to a truly great man, to tell him that I have need of him. I will do anything for him, from blacking his boots to correcting his proofs.”

“Or rubbing his back?” I ventured to suggest.

“I cannot aspire to so much honour,” said John.

We breakfasted almost in silence. My friend was evidently nervous; and I was wondering if there would be much change in him, if he would be improved out of my reach, beyond my power of appreciation. At 10.30 he swallowed a powerful dose of sal volatile, wrung my hand in silence, and left me. I saw

him cross the road. From the opposite doorstep he waved his hand, like a young and stainless knight bound on some great quest, and disappeared.

II.

IF you wish to hear my account of my friend's intercourse with Mr. Damon, I must first warn you that some of the details, in which I delight, are inferred from others which John has given me, and from my knowledge of my friend's character, which I have studied so long. But you care nothing for this. And so, let me to my story.

John explained to the maid-servant who admitted him that he would introduce himself. As he walked slowly but firmly up-stairs he thought of Boswell's first interview with Johnson, and of that happy day when Eckermann first saw the great Goethe "dressed in a blue frock-coat, and with shoes." "What a sublime form!" was the comment of the German youth; but the more taciturn Englishman made no such observation on entering the room of Mr. Damon. Opposite to him, as he

entered, was a large back still slouching over the breakfast-table. "Some more toast," said the sage.

"I beg your pardon," said John.

"Hollo! oh! eh!" and Mr. Damon turned slowly in his chair.

My friend found himself much embarrassed. "I took the liberty," he began.

"Oh! ah! precisely! but I am afraid I must ask you to call again. The fact is that I don't happen to have it by me."

"I beg your pardon," said John.

"You can leave the bill, you know."

It was an unlucky beginning. As the two men looked at each other it became gradually clear to the elder that the gallant young fellow before him was neither his slavey nor an unreasonable shop-boy. John did not know what to say, confounded partly by the difficulty of explaining his purpose, partly by the confusion which was painfully apparent on the large face before him. Mr. Damon rolled his big head, and then had nothing better to say than, "Would not you like—in fact—to take a chair?"

John took a chair, and a pause ensued. But

he felt that he could not sit silent. He was just on the point of speaking of the weather, when he was moved to make a bold plunge, and said abruptly, "I want to thank you for all the good which I have got from your writings." The great man looked at him suspiciously: he thought that he was going to be asked for an autograph.

His guest went on earnestly—

"I hope that I have not been wrong in coming to you; but won't you tell me what to do?"

"What to do!" repeated the other, on whose open countenance was a strange mixture of embarrassment and dawning gratification.

"I mean, what to do with my life."

"Live it," said Mr. Damon, on the spur of the moment, and with a happy reminiscence of one of his early sayings. It sounded well, and he repeated in a deeper tone, "Live it." Nor did it fail to make an impression on my friend. He thought it over. Then, as he saw his host grow calm after his inspired utterance, and settle himself in his chair, he felt that he had established his footing, and prepared to enlarge on his difficulties. As he warmed with the

subject, he grew almost eloquent. He spoke of his strong desire to do something which should add in some way to the public good ; and said how hard it was to find the right thing to do. Philanthropy, even when harmless, could but cleanse one house in a city of corruption. Statesmanship seemed little more than the science of getting place. Business was a mere race for comforts, or a substitute for the gaming-house. The mission of art was to tickle the fat ribs of the stall-fed financier ; that of literature, to charm away those idle hours of the hectic matron which were not devoted to millinery or flirtation. Such, briefly, was the talk of John, who, I confess, was at times no wiser than other clever youths, who are apt to be intoxicated by the sudden consciousness of their own cleverness, and by the nimbleness of their tongues. Only he is unlike them all. He is so truly enthusiastic and warm-hearted. He is such a really fine fellow.

As Mr. Damon listened to his guest's speech, his attention became by degrees more and more closely fixed. He had heard a good deal which was very like it. Indeed, as he listened, there

dawned again for him a day in his own youth when, with a crust of bread and an apple in his pocket, he had roamed from morning till nightfall among the Westmoreland hills, sometimes raving in verse, and sometimes wondering why nobody had come to set the clumsy world to rights before.

Yet he felt a stir about his heart which he had not experienced since he tried his first electric bath ten years before. The tones of the brave young voice were like wine to him. Gradually one thought became predominant in his mind. He forgot that the boy was asking for help, as he wondered whether he could get help from the boy. Was it possible that his old faith, which he had never abandoned, but which had so long been a dead heap on which criticisms might be founded—was it possible that the mass could glow again? If he could but get regular doses of this fresh enthusiasm, what might he not accomplish even now? The solemn criticisms with which he occupied himself daily seemed to him in his unwonted mood heavy as dough. He remembered the works of his youth and of his prime, and heard the echo of old praises. He remembered plans,

long since abandoned, for compressing all life into a work of fiction, or living in the lives of the many divers characters of that great drama which had never been written. Suddenly he remembered a great trunk full of papers which had stood untouched for many years. As he was thinking of this trunk, John finished his confession, and leaned forward in his chair waiting for advice. Mr. Damon looked at the flushed cheeks and bright eyes before him, and felt that he had found a tonic. He pulled himself together, and sat up in his chair.

"It is very interesting," he said.

"But what shall I do?" asked John.

"Ah! that is the question," remarked the other, solemnly; and then added, as if suddenly inspired, "Come and see me again. Come any day—every day—in fact to-morrow. I should like to talk to you."

"And you will give me something to do?" cried the young man, much elated.

"Ah, yes, to be sure! Something to do, eh? Come again—yes, come again to-morrow at eleven. We must see more of each other. Good-morning."

"Good-morning," said John, starting up, as

he found himself dismissed. "And you will tell me to-morrow what I am to do?" he asked.

"Yes, to-morrow, to-morrow. Come to-morrow, come—in fact, at eleven."

III.

AFTER his first interview with the great Mr. Damon, my friend was in a state of excitement and exaltation. Again and again he burst forth into praises of his master's silent influence. He was so great and calm. About him was an atmosphere of culture, and to breathe it was education. In such an air, and under such royal eyes, John felt that he too would become wise and good. He aspired to be a channel through which the sweet waters of culture, springing in the bosom of Mr. Damon, might be carried abroad into the thirsty land. His plan of educating himself, that he might benefit others, seemed already accomplished; and for one evening he enjoyed a future at once sure and noble.

The next morning, exactly at eleven, he walked across the dusty road as one who trod the air, and entered the opposite house. His

host was ready to receive him, and stepped forward as he entered. "This is well; this is friendly," he said, and he continued to shake his visitor's hand slowly as he added, "I have been thinking how we can get on best. We must not be too wide, eh? There must be some central point; something—in fact, something to come back to."

"Something for me to work at?" suggested John, making a slight and respectful effort to become master of his own hand. Mr. Damon opened his large fingers and allowed the imprisoned hand to fall. "I have had that trunk brought down here," he said: "it contains some papers written by me at various times on various subjects. You might look over them if you like."

"Of course I should like it," cried the disciple. "Shall I put them in order?"

"Perhaps that would be best."

"And tell you what is in them?"

"I don't see why not. And then we might talk them over, eh?"

"And then you can make up your mind what to finish and what to publish. May I begin at once?"

"I don't see why not," said the sage; and added after a pause, "there are some sketches, I think, and studies of character made when I was planning a work of fiction some time ago. I was—in fact, I was a younger man then."

"Oh, why did not you finish it?" asked my friend, in a tone of regret. "It would be such a great thing for us to see the world as you saw it when you were young."

Mr. Damon slowly shook his head. "My critical labours," he began, and then stopped as his eye wandered absently to the old trunk. John regarded him in silence, afraid to break his train of thought. Presently the great man sank into an easy-chair and took up a book. John glanced at him and then at the trunk. Its lid was open, and close beside it was a table on which paper, pens, and ink were placed. Concluding that the preparations were for him, and that he need not disturb his master, he stepped lightly across the room, seated himself at the table, and lifted a handful of loose papers from the trunk. For an hour he worked steadily, reading, considering, and classifying. Suddenly it occurred to him that he felt a slight oppression. He raised his

head and looked about him. He perceived that the great man had not stirred. He glanced at the windows, and saw that they were both shut. He would have liked to open one of them ; but he felt that it was not for him, who had been admitted to the enjoyment of a privilege, to suggest an alteration in his benefactor's habits. He gave himself a shake to clear his head, and turned again to his work. He was on the track of his friend's great novel, and had already found two sketches of the plot, which differed in many particulars. Now he came upon a complete chapter kept together by an old boot-lace, and now upon a coverless book full of witty or pretty sayings and fragments of dialogue. A plan of the heroine's character was disinterred from under a massive essay on Evolution, and some suggestions for a comic man were found among the crumpled pages of an analysis of Mill's 'Logic.' The interest of the searcher was kept alive partly by the excitement of the chase, and partly by some of the passages which he read. Nevertheless he found it unusually hard to keep his attention fixed, and was annoyed with himself for allowing his thoughts to wander to trivial

matters. He found himself waiting for his friend's periodical cough, and wondering why so great a man had acquired the habit of clearing his throat at such regular intervals. At the same time he became more and more conscious of a faint furry smell. Presently, as he stooped for another bundle of papers, he connected that strange odour with the trunk, which was of a hairy species now happily rare. He observed that the hair was generally loose and had left several bald places. His nostril twitched, but he steadied himself and picked out a bundle. He opened a large sheet of foolscap and saw that it contained, not only the outline of Part III. of the novel, but also a large oblong grease-spot—a shiny and transparent place. He looked at the windows and then at Mr. Damon, who was still reading and did not meet his eye. Then he said to himself that it was weakness to be disturbed by trifles; then he laid down his pencil, leaned back in his chair, and pressed his hands to his forehead, which was beginning to ache: He languidly thought of last night's enthusiasm, and his lips began to murmur a phrase which he had used so glibly, "the atmosphere of culture." He looked with a dull

eye at the hair trunk. Presently he started at the sound of his master's cough, shook himself impatiently, and, leaning forward again, spread out his papers with an air of stern determination.

Two hours had passed since John entered the room, when his friend laid down his book, rose slowly, and stood beside him. He supported himself by the back of the young man's chair, and, as he bent forward to look at his work, he pressed so heavily on his shoulders that the active youth had much ado to save himself from being flattened on to the table. The man of culture was certainly too big for the room; and John caught himself thinking that this hero, whom he had praised as so great and calm, might be called by a scoffer only fat and lymphatic. He dismissed the idea. To him this man, even though he leaned so heavily on his shoulders, was really great and calm. He would believe in his greatness. What better proof could there be than indifference to the petty details of life, to the perfume of an old hair trunk, to the oiliness of a bit of paper, to an unbrushed coat? For it could not be maintained that the coat which was pressed against

the back of John's head had been brushed that morning. Short, perhaps too short for a stout wearer, in colour a faded purple, it belonged to that class of garments which are worn by sedentary men only in their studies. John is fond of simplicity, and he wished that that coat had never been adorned with silk facings and a velvet collar. There was a more recent decoration. When the man of culture moved round to the side of the table, his friend's attention was caught for the second time by a spot of grease, and he began with some earnestness to compare the one on the coat with the other which shone on the foolscap before him.

"Well, well! we shall make something of it, eh?" said Mr. Damon.

John was almost too languid to answer, but he tried to nod cheerfully.

"Shall we talk it over to-morrow?" continued his friend. "I have promised—well, I have promised to go out to luncheon with somebody—in fact, with my publisher."

The young man started up briskly, and instantly felt ashamed of his alacrity.

"At the same time to-morrow, eh? We will have a nice long morning," said the man of cul-

ture ; and taking the other's hand in his, he began to shake it slowly.

"Thanks," said John, and was vexed at the dreary tone of his voice. He looked apologetically at his friend, vaguely wondering if he would forget to drop his hand and so keep him there forever. Presently his arm fell heavily by his side ; then he stretched it out for his hat ; then, gasping out some incoherent expressions of gratitude, he got himself out of the room, stumbled down the stairs, fumbled at the door, and presently stood in the street drawing a long breath.

Mr. Damon brushed his hair with unwonted vigour, and, as he went to luncheon, caught himself buzzing, and thought that he was humming a tune.

IV.

As the days went by, I saw that my friend became thinner in body and more restless in mind. His face had a harassed look, and in the morning his eyes wandered every moment to the clock. At length I could no longer bear to watch the change, and I spoke. At first he scarcely attended to my words; but gradually he listened more and more, and at last, after a hurried glance over his shoulder, he turned suddenly towards me, and seizing, both my hands with nervous energy, began to speak.

"How can I get out of it?" he cried, passionately.

"It is a failure, then?" I asked.

Then he poured out all his troubles. He spoke of the atmosphere of culture; of the trunk that was growing balder every day; of the papers which their owner disarranged every evening, and which every morning were

less pleasant to handle. As he spoke in an awe-struck voice, it seemed like the story of an evil dream, in which some cumbrous Penelope unwove another's web with clumsy fingers.

"But the papers themselves?" I asked; "surely their contents are some compensation?"

He shook his head sadly. "There are fine things," he said—"bits of character, scenes like life, great thoughts put tersely; but——"

"But what?" I asked.

He looked at me sadly and said, "I would not say this to anybody but you. Those good things are buried—buried under heaps, monstrous heaps, of loose sentences, loose thoughts, great masses of undigested commonplace. They must have been done at all times, in all moods—some, I feel sure, in sleep. The roses and cabbages are all loose in one cart, the roses under the cabbages—great, shapeless, overgrown, sodden cabbages." Here his face sank into utter gloom.

"But you are collecting the roses," I cried, eagerly.

His voice was low as he answered, "He likes the cabbages quite as well; he can't bear to give up a single cabbage."

"Then what can you do?" I asked.

"Nothing," he answered.

"And you are wasting all your talent in doing——"

"Nothing," he said again.

"And this man wishes you to——" I paused astounded at my friend's infatuation.

"He cannot bear me to be a moment behind my time!" he said, and he glanced for the hundredth time at the clock.

"For heaven's sake cut him!" I cried; "the man is a vampire."

"I have taken up my burden," said he.

"You have crept under a feather-bed," said I. "Come out before you are smothered."

He smiled faintly, and I was encouraged to speak more earnestly. At last I thought that I had convinced him. I saw the light of hope come back into his eyes, and I heard a brighter tone in his voice. But my time was short. He suddenly caught sight of the clock, and sprang to his feet. It was past eleven. As he dashed down-stairs, I called from the landing, "Give him up! give him up!" He made no answer. Then I flew to the window and shouted as he

rushed across the street. An answer came back from the opposite door-step, which sounded like, "I will try." I sat down with my eyes fixed upon Mr. Damon's lodgings.

John found his master staring listlessly at the clock, and in despair at his secretary's desertion. He heaved a great sigh of relief when the young man entered; but his face looked pale and loose, and his body very limp in his wide chair. John had determined as he ran up-stairs to make a rush for freedom.

"I am afraid that I can't be of any more use to you," he cried, with a gasp.

"What?" asked the other, in a tone of blank dismay.

"I think I must leave you."

"Leave me!"

"I am doing no good. I must find something to do. I always told you that I must do something."

"Do something!" muttered the great man. "You mean—you mean that you are doing no good in helping me?" He spoke with a muffled voice; then suddenly, in an acute tone, he cried, "Is it all bad?"

John stepped hurriedly backward, and looked

at his friend in amazement. Was the great man appealing to him?

"Bad!" he cried; "there are splendid things in it. I shall always be grateful to you for letting me see them. There are bits which you wrote——"

"Which I wrote twenty years ago."

"There are splendid things," cried John again, alarmed by the other's hollow tone. "Anybody could carve a fine book from those papers. It only wants a few links added and——and form."

"Form!" muttered Mr. Damon, sinking lower in his chair. By this time his guest was only anxious to cheer the sage by any means. He had forgotten his own melancholy as he cried with warmth, "It would be a fine work, and the public——"

"They don't care for me now."

"And what does it matter if they don't?" asked the young man, who was once more the eager partisan. "You have done them good——you have done them good; and what does their ingratitude matter?"

Mr. Damon swayed forward towards the table, and laid his large head upon his arms. With

his face thus hidden he said in a gloomy voice, "I can't do without it."

"Without what?"

"Popularity," said the sage, and he sniffed ominously. Perhaps his gloom was partly caused by a heavy cold in the head. John started, and looked at the slouching figure before him with a certain degree of horror, which presently struck him as comical. He smiled, and the smile grew pitiful. Then the great man, with his face still buried, unburdened his mind. His confession dropped from him as heavy drops of rain-water gather at the end of a choked pipe, and so fall one by one. Many times he paused to gasp or to blow his nose, but he always began again as if impelled by some slow force. He said that for years he had felt himself each day more neglected, more lonely: old friends had died or gone away; no new ones had come: people went after fresh idols: publishers instead of eager inquiries gave him cold respect. The young man listening to him found his eyes grow moist as he thought of some old crumbling statue left motionless in the desert when the vivid procession bearing ivory, gold, and peacocks, sweet-scented wood,

and many-folded garments steeped in dyes, had passed away forever. Presently Mr. Damon went on to tell how he had felt new life thrill through him at the coming of a new disciple; how he had hoped again for sympathy, first of this one bright young nature, and then of others won by him. He said that he was utterly weary of criticism; that he had hoped to produce something which some young hearts might welcome; that he had not the energy now to do it alone. John listened full of strange thoughts. He felt some contempt and much pity for this hero, at whose feet he had hoped to sit, and whom he now saw palpitating like a great jelly before his own. There crossed his mind a whimsical fancy that here was that great critic who had devoured all other critics, who had devoured all literature, until the wide field of culture was a desert, and on it one monster with a chronic indigestion. But his face was animated and his eye bright once more as he laid his hand upon the monster's pulpy shoulder. He felt that he could do something after all. "Look here," he said; "let me take away those papers which I have collected, and form out of them a complete book. Let me take what I

like and reject what I like." Here his host heaved under his hand, and John inferred a sigh ; but as no objection was made he went on : " It will all be yours, you know—all the matter and value. I shall only put it in order and add a few necessary links. Then, if you like it, you shall give it to the world." He paused, and there came a doubtful sniff in answer.

"I tell you," said John, impatiently, "that there are great things in it. We all want them, we young men. We shall buzz about you like bees." He gave the great shoulder a slight shove. A large limp hand was pushed out side-wise, and began moving round blindly. The young man grasped it with his nervous fingers. Then at last the man of culture looked up, and there was in his eyes a look of dumb entreaty and trust, as of an old dog who can follow his master no farther.

"We will carry it through," cried John, who felt a strange sensation in his throat.

Thus it came to pass that the disciple sat no more at the feet of his master, but rose to take him on his shoulders ; and hence came the book, without which, as you judiciously remark, no gentleman's library is complete.

ROMANCE OF AN OLD DON.



ROMANCE OF AN OLD DON.

I.

It can do no harm to assert in the presence of a sceptical race of undergraduates that the Rev. Stanley Betel was once young. He was young; it may almost be said that he was in love. Were I not afraid of encouraging the young cynics, who since the day of Thackeray are thicker than the frank snobs before him, I would add roundly that he was almost in love with a married woman.

From the time when Stanley, not only young but even an extremely small boy, had got on to the foundation of an ancient public school and into a hat and gown two sizes too large for him, he had never doubted that it was his duty to relieve the paternal purse by gaining what money he could. He had not had much time for doubts, for he screwed up his short-sighted eyes over

Greek letters and shut his long thin nose into dictionaries, until, after acquiring many shelves of handsome books with Latin inscriptions to his honour, he had begun to gain money also. Finally, when a college fellowship had made him wholly independent of parental aid, the habit yet remained; and he would have felt wicked if he had refused a chance of earning money. Thus it happened that long ago, when even Stanley Betel was young, he betook himself to Kirby in the Long Vacation to coach young Orme for his matriculation.

Do what he would, the young fellow could not make his pupil do much work. Young Orme had a hearty love of outdoor life and a cheerful belief in his good luck. He was fond of assuring his anxious instructor that he should scrape through somehow; and the instructor was so little older and of a bodily presence (if Mr. Betel may be said to have had a bodily presence) so much less imposing, that he had but small authority. And so it fell out that the young don, who had worked so hard, yielded bashfully and with many thrills of conscience to the charm and leisure of the place. He told himself anxiously that he must not

accustom himself to luxury ; but in the drowsy air of Long Vacation, in the great shadows of trees on the wide lawn, in the sloping woods and open glades of Kirby, there was a luxury to which even the most delicate conscience could scarcely take exception.

There were people staying in the house, a summer party, relations and intimate friends, playing croquet (those were the days of croquet) in the cool, exchanging family jokes from garden chairs, dancing after dinner, very much at home. They were rather light people, in whom their host and their host's son found much delight. These were part of the opulent show, at which Stanley Betel blinked with a new pleasure ; but their radiance was as nothing in his narrow eyes when he turned reverently to the lady of the house, the lady of the world, his pupil's mother, Mrs. Orme.

In Mrs. Orme the young tutor beheld a new sort of woman. He had had so little time to look at women. Feminine beauty and grace were linked in his mind only with the pale Hellenic phantoms of his well-worn classical dictionary. It may almost be said that he had never seen a woman except his mother ; and the

good Mrs. Betel was one whose strange garments suitable for any weather hung in a narrow hall, where also was a prevalent smell of mutton, and who dashed all crooked into her bonnet at the hasty summons of some village sufferer. Now Mrs. Orme appeared before Mrs. Betel's son, tall, large, and stately, but very gracious, betraying the goddess as she moved on the smooth-shaven green, and dressed with sumptuous simplicity. Stanley thought reverently of Mrs. Orme's gowns; if he had seen one hanging on a peg, he would not have ventured to sit down in its presence. In that new leisure which his impatient pupil forced upon him, he spent much time in wondering at this gracious dignified lady. Trembling he arrived at the daring conclusion that she was lonely; with a wild throb, half painful and half exquisitely pleasant, he found himself pitying her. He was sure that she was lonely. He could see for all his screwed-up eyes that she was of different clay from her guests. It is true that the young girls told each other that she was perfect, that she was a dear; and they came to her a dozen times a day for unnecessary advice. It is true that men of all ages treated her with

a deference unusual in a disrespectful age. Still Mr. Betel knew, and it was with ecstasy that he whispered to himself that he alone knew, that this gracious, splendid woman was lonely. And when this Penelope, translated into English for the young scholar, began to show an interest in his thoughts and his studies, and even to ask his advice about books, he straightway fell down at her silent feet and worshipped. He would have given his poor little angular body to the stake for her.

Mrs. Orme, on her side, was interested by her boy's tutor. She said to herself placidly that it was a pity that she had lived so little with clever people; she seemed to have known nobody worth talking to. Mrs. Orme was not forty, but she was so near that age that she had begun to think herself an old woman; she had begun to think also now and then that she had not lived. Beautifully brought up, and married, as a girl should be, in her second season, she had been delighted with her handsome and gallant husband, who had a capital seat on horseback and enough money for all the necessities of town and country life. She had a French cook, a French dressmaker, and a French poodle;

some people said that she had the neatest ponies in London. As for Kirby, it was the ideal country-place, neither too near to nor too far from town, and the nicest people always wished to be invited there. Nobody doubted that Mrs. Orme was a very lucky woman. Some of her female friends murmured to each other that it was a pity that she had no girl; but then, when a place like Kirby was in question, how fortunate she was in the possession of three boys, all stout and ruddy as their father! It was when the youngest of these three sturdy lads went to school that Mrs. Orme felt for the first time that her life was monotonous. She had many excellent female friends who felt themselves full of tact. Hardly anybody in her circle did or said the wrong thing. Her husband, on his side, had troops of male friends who beheld Orme's wife with unvarying admiration and respect. She felt that they ranked her as a great British institution with Church and State. And yet, in spite of all the advantages of her position, Mrs. Orme, when she had lived for nearly forty years, sometimes wondered if she had lived at all. Her husband had never

given her a moment's uneasiness. As she had never in all those years admitted to herself that her husband was stupid, so at this time of her life she would have been deeply shocked by the suggestion that she sometimes regretted that she had not been a little, a very little, fast. She had always turned coldly from those of her acquaintance about whom other women whispered eagerly over tea-cups; but it is certain that at this time these women of many experiences were more often in her thoughts. She was a little tired of her houseful of gay, harmless young people, and a little more conscious than usual that her husband found them not a day too young. It seemed hardly satisfactory that a man should have no pursuits more serious than croquet and hunting, and his wife no more important duty than to see his new horse or admire his new hat. And so, when she turned her eyes from the inevitable hoops on the green, she found that they rested with a faint interest on her boy's tutor. She wondered if this sort of serious and industrious young men made anything better of life. It was not long before she became aware that her interest was returned a hundredfold. The

slight and learned youth narrowed his eyes that he might see her better, and dropped them quickly when she looked at him. His thin cheek blushed when she spoke to him, and he stammered in his answers. She smiled at her interest in this new variety of his sex, but the interest was strong enough to raise her now and then from that consciousness of the monotony of life which was now too often with her. She liked to keep him near her in the cool morning-room or on the wide lawn. She asked him about books and learned men; and she pleased herself with the suspicion of his fluttering feelings, of his unfathomed devotion.

When it was time for Stanley Betel to leave his Capua, and the cart was at the door, his hostess stood on the broad stone step with a very real feeling of regret. The young tutor blinked in her calm splendid presence; he pressed her fingers harder than he knew with his nervous hand. "Well," he said, stammering, "I don't know how to say—I never can thank—I shall never, in fact, forget, I—I have been so happy." He tripped on the step of the dog-cart, and with a scraped shin and a bruised heart was driven rapidly away from the fair beguiling regions of romance.

II.

FOR the next thirty years nothing happened to Mr. Stanley Betel. He took orders, as his parents had always intended; and, for the rest, he delivered lectures a great many times to succeeding gangs of half-heedful, half-contemptuous undergraduates. When he was not lecturing, he was preparing new lectures or putting new stuff into the old. He never doubted that it was his duty to fill his hour's discourse as full as it would hold; he never doubted that he owed a great debt to the college which had chosen him as its fellow and rewarded him for his loyalty by keeping his long sensitive nose constantly on the grindstone.

The Rev. Stanley Betel had no time for love, and very little for study. In his youth he had sometimes, in his boldest moments, dared to dream that he might contribute his mite to the prodigious discoveries of scholars. Perhaps in a

vision he had seen the name "Betelius" in smallest print at the foot of a fair page of Greek, his name thus made immortal by the notice of a German commentator. But slowly this timid hope faded, as year after year he taught the same lesson in almost the same words to successive squads of candidates for honours in the schools. Nevertheless in the rare intervals of leisure he applied himself diligently to the study of ancient text and crabbed commentary. He felt that this was the least which he could do in return for the many advantages of his life. He saw that it was right to labour with might and main, if by any means he could bring some credit to the college which had endowed him with a high and enviable position. So when he was not lecturing nor preparing lectures, he was comparing passages of ancient authors, commentaries on the passages, and commentaries on the commentaries. He led a very studious life for thirty years; and nothing happened to him in that time.

Of course Stanley Betel grew older. Each year he became thinner and more jerky. His short-sighted eyes acquired from much narrowing and peering at inattentive youth a great

store of fine lines and creases at the corners. The slight hesitation in his speech, the modest and not ungraceful pauses of the young student, were filled by the veteran tutor, that he might avoid strange silences in his lectures, with a little repeated monosyllable which added nothing to the sense of his words. Such other little habits as that of darting his inquisitive nose and skinny finger at the person from whom he was asking information, became more and more emphatic. His walk became more hurried and less direct. He seemed to drift sideways, or to be blown along with his wide clerical skirts floating or flapping behind him. He was an old don.

The Rev. Stanley Betel was an old don when, slanting his nose along the paper which showed the names of candidates for the college scholarships, he espied the word "Orme." He was in a flutter; he felt a keen unusual interest. It was Mr. Betel's duty that morning to distribute to those ambitious boys the first paper of their examination. In careful fulfilment of this task he was dispensing to each youth a printed page when he caught sight of a face which made him gasp and blink. He knew that he

was looking at Orme; and his mind ran back over all those years and assured itself in a moment that this was Mrs. Orme's grandson. He gave the boy half-a-dozen papers, for his fingers were trembling. There was an odd thrill under his narrow clerical waistcoat. The boy looked up smiling as he returned the superfluous papers; and Mr. Betel, drifting along by the chair-backs, could not entirely disentangle this young delicate face from that of the handsome matron who had been kind to him at Kirby thirty summers ago. The boy's face was the handsomer and the more delicate. Indeed it is a beautiful face, delicate and resolute, and classic in its fine regularity. Mr. Betel said to himself, as the hours of examination went by, that it was the face of a fine scholar; but remembering his former pupil, whom with amazement he concluded to be the candidate's father, he did not dare to hope. But he soon found that here was a scholar indeed, one born with exquisite discrimination. "Even his—well—mistakes," said Mr. Betel on the last day of the examination to a fellow-don, "are—well—beautiful." He blushed at the extravagance of his own praise, but he felt better for having dared to say it.

He made himself so bold that he dared to stop young Orme in the quadrangle, and to ask him with a little shower of "wells" about Kirby and about his—in fact—father. About his grandmother he did not dare to ask; but still he was elated by his own prowess. It is perhaps lucky that the college allowed the Rev. Stanley Betel very little voice in the selection of its scholars. He would have tortured himself with efforts to be strictly impartial. When it was announced that his particular candidate had got one of the scholarships, he was radiant as with a personal victory. Alone, at night, he said to himself with a faint blush on his hollow cheek that he almost felt as if it was almost a—well—son of his own.

The friendship between the old don and the young scholar grew apace. In the former it soon became the strongest feeling of which he was capable. Never had the reverend gentleman been torn by passion. His blush had been faint as he read of enchanting women in his well-worn classical dictionary. He had never thought of marriage for himself. Indeed he cherished a mild preference for clerical celibacy, a preference so mild that it did not prevent him

from smiling, though a little protesting, at the fine old common-room jests which flowed again when one of his mates slipped downward to matrimony and a country rectory. For himself he had had no thought of love, nor time for loving. And so there grew up in his heart, now grown old, like a faint flower delayed by untimely frosts, a pale love, which might have grown strong in earlier days about a wife and children. He wondered what he had done that his laborious days should be made beautiful with youth and charm; that fortune should have brought to his staircase the grandson of the one woman who had moved his boyish dreams. At first he invited his young friend with the diffidence of a bashful lover; but, since the guest was not at all shy and soon acquired the habit of dropping in at all hours, the diffidence of the host wore off and only the joy remained. It was a very tender affection which had taken root in the old don's breast. He seemed half bashful suitor, half proud fond parent. Why seek to analyze further this delicate pale feeling which had blossomed late in a somewhat dry life? It is enough to say that the tutor regarded his pupil with extraordinary tenderness.

Basil Orme accepted the affection of this don, who had known "his people," with much pleasure. He was very fond of being liked, and accustomed to it. Physically, mentally, morally, he had always been liked and admired. He had a delicate wit (though he had small perception of humour), delicate manners, and a delicate and most delightful scholarship. He had won many prizes and won them easily. He expected nice things to come easily; and the affection of this neat fluttering elderly gentleman promised nice things. He was fastidious, and, when he was tired of the shouts and clumsy fun of other undergraduates, he liked the quiet and order of Mr. Betel's quasi-Gothic apartments. It was not long before he had pushed about the stiff furniture, and given to the severe study a more friendly air. He had exquisite taste. He was ambitious too, and he soon found that over a cup of tea, which was his elderly friend's chief luxury, he could learn a great deal in the easiest and pleasantest manner. He picked Mr. Betel's brains, and Mr. Betel liked it. He found that his bright presence and ready smile paid a high price for all; and he liked to smile and to know that his presence was bright. And so the friend-

ship grew with each year of the boy's undergraduate life ; and it seemed that a very beautiful thing had come to the Rev. Stanley Betel in his declining years. About him there was a fair reflection from a half-remembered past, which his timid imagination had veiled with a soft mist of sentiment. Often, as he sat in his stiff-backed chair, there breathed around him the summer air of Kirby Place. There were soft pathetic echoes, a tender evening reflection of the romance of long ago.

.III.

It seemed as if capricious fortune would shower gifts upon Mr. Betel's head, which was too narrow and too highly pointed for the bearing of many gifts. He was so grateful for the charm of youth and friendship which had come to grace his sliding years, that one might have thought that his stock of gratitude was exhausted. But if his head was high and narrow, his thankfulness was wide and deep ; and, when one day it seemed as if glory was to be his as well as love, he almost fell on his knees beside his patent knee-hole writing-table. It was the force of a word which struck him, and it was a very little word ; but it almost brought him to his knees. It was a very little word ; and, moreover, the different force which had suddenly struck the old scholar as possible was so very little different from the force which the word usually conveyed, that to the ordinary

right-minded mutton-fed Englishman there would have seemed no difference at all. To the Rev. Stanley Betel it was different as light from darkness. There was a sudden and a blinding illumination. If this little word could have this slightly different influence, the dark sentence at which his old eyes were peering for the thousandth time was clear as day. He sat back in his chair, grasping its arms tightly with his long thin fingers. He shut his eyes, while his breath came with a little sob. Then before his closed eyes sentence after sentence, each a puzzle to the learned, arose in order; and each seemed clear by this new light to the learned Betel. Could the provoking little word have this precise force? It seemed certain; it seemed impossible. The little admirable tall brain was in a blaze. It seemed impossible. Either this theory about the word was false, or it was old. It could not be that it had not occurred to some one of those literary Moltkes who sit down patiently and besiege for a lifetime the careless sentence of an ancient writer. And so Mr. Betel's leisure was given to perusing Teutonic Latin. He breakfasted with a German; he lunched

with a German ; he lay down and rose up with their laborious investigations ; he brushed the long wisp of hair which he placed across his skull above their crabbed pages. Whenever he was not lecturing, he was prying into the notes of the learned. It was tremendous. Not a sign did he see that his theory had occurred to any one of them. And yet it was not to be dismissed as absurd. The more he compared passages, the more certain he felt that he had hit on a great discovery. Not all his modesty could make him doubt forever. There were irrepressible moments of confidence, moments in which he saw his name inscribed in at least one sentence in the unending history of scholarship. He feared lest he should be dazzled by the too splendid prospect. He prayed against pride. At last after a thousand fluttering hopes and fears he made up his mind to confide in the being whom he loved best. He could no longer bear the weight of his secret without the sympathy of a friend.

Basil Orme received the old don's confidence with his most charming manner. He was delighted with the theory ; he was sure that it was at least a most ingenious suggestion. He

did not venture to express an opinion about its novelty. "How should I know," he said, with his frank engaging smile, "if some old German has not thought of it at some time or other? But I feel sure that not one of them has," he added in a moment, as the old face fell; and he passed his arm round Mr. Betel's shoulders (if shoulders they may be called), and patted him where the deltoid muscle appears in some other persons. "I cannot—well—be—in fact—sure—well," said Mr. Betel; "but I cannot find a single—well—trace." He opened and shut his mouth like a nervous fish, and his young comrade patted him again. And then, as he felt Basil's hand upon him, the conscience of the old don awoke with a terrible start. He remembered that, absorbed by the force of his little word, he had almost forgotten that this was his friend's last term of undergraduate life. How abominable it seemed to be so concentrated in one's own efforts that one should forget the coming struggle of one's friend! Young Orme was in for "Greats," and Mr. Betel had been most deeply interested in his success. Now it seemed impossible that he had thought of it so little in the last few weeks.

His conscience was positively hammering him as he began to pour forth broken questions about his young friend's progress. His young friend, however, was cool and confident; and he assured Mr. Betel for the twentieth time that, whether he continued to enliven the old gray stones of Oxford, or transferred his illuminating powers to the bar and to the senate, he should always take care to see a great deal of him. The old tutor felt with shame that his pupil was more generous to him than he deserved. He begged him to come to him at any time, however unseasonable, if there were any questions of any kind to which he needed an answer. Then, with his conscience quieted in some degree, he went back to his engrossing theory.

For the few weeks of the term which yet remained to him, he worked at all hours. With nervous tremors and hesitations he began the all-important task of preparing the first rough draught of the pamphlet which he only half dared to foresee in the dim future. Very careful, very symmetrical, and very polished was that pamphlet of his dreams. Meanwhile he worked so hard at the first of the many rough

draughts which were to be, that it was likely that no later version could surpass it in accuracy and neatness of form. Into it he packed with nicest care the result of all his investigations and comparisons of texts and of commentaries. Every moment which he could spare from his faithful labours as tutor and lecturer, he gave to this fine piece of mosaic-work, which he regarded as the roughest of a series of rough draughts.

On one of the last afternoons of term, when Mr. Betel was bending over his anxious work, he was startled by a loud rapping at his outer door. He started up with his conscience in a terrible state; he had forgotten for at least half-an-hour that it was the day on which Basil Orme was to be examined *viva voce*. The last of the paper-work had been finished some days ago; and in the morning which had just passed, certain candidates with names late in the alphabet had confronted the examiners in person. Among them was Basil Orme. And so the banging at his "oak" made the old don jump with a sense of guilt, for he knew that his friend had come to tell him how he had fared in the ordeal.

"I ought to tell you," he began, hurriedly, as he opened the door, "that I had—well—forgot ten for a moment—in fact, forgotten——"

"Never mind, never mind," cried the lad ; he was flushed and spoke quickly ; he walked about the room. "Our theory has had an immense success," he said, quickly. "I have been complimented by the examiners. I don't think I told you that in one of the papers we had to translate the bit which is the very strongest in support of our theory ; of course I did it in our way, and I put a short note at the end. I never dreamt it would make such an excitement. It has had a tremendous success."

"They complimented *you* ?" said the old don, faintly.

"Oh yes ; I'm all right. They as good as told me that nobody had done better. I can't stop ; I am going to town to tell my people, but I couldn't go without saying good-bye to you. I haven't a minute. Good-bye." He wrung his friend's hand ; he half embraced him ; he said some more tender things very quickly ; he was in a very great hurry.

The old don went back to his chair, and there he sat staring at the rough draught. He sat quite

still till the next person came to his door; and when he heard him, he began with nervous haste to tear up his MS. He thrust the bits into the waste-paper basket as his "scout" came in with a note. The note was from one of the examiners, who could not rest till he had congratulated the Rev. Stanley Betel on his brilliant pupil. Of course he could write nothing yet about the result of the examination; but he was looking forward to telling Mr. Betel of a most beautiful piece of translation done by one of the candidates in whom he was interested. Right or wrong, the new force given to a word in this passage, which had been a puzzle to scholars, was original and of surpassing interest to scholars all over the world. Appearing as a suggestion from a mere boy, it was amazing, phenomenal.

"I won't dine," said Mr. Betel to the scout, who was still moving about the room.

"Shall I bring some tea, sir?" asked the scout.

"Yes, yes, if you please—in fact, yes—tea."

The old don drank his cup of tea by the light of his shaded reading-lamp. He treated himself to half-a-cup more; he thought it might steady

him, for the cup and saucer rattled in his small thin hands. He opened one of his favorite books, but it looked strange to his dim eyes ; he could not read ; books seemed stale and unprofitable, and this new feeling frightened him. He sat with the volume open on his knees and began to tell himself that he had a great deal to be thankful for. What good things beyond his poor deserts had come to him in life ! He could well afford to forego something. And so he began to think less timidly of the brilliant boy whose boyish days were over ; and he thought how much he, a dull elderly man, owed to that bright affectionate being. At last, with his old head bowed on the hard corner of his patent writing-table, he prayed silently that all the good things of life might come to Basil Orme.

A MAD PARSON.

A MAD PARSON.

I.

MR. CLAUDIAN FAIRHOLME woke in the darkness of the night. It was the last night of spring or the first night of summer; and through the open window the silent air came, and with it all the warm life of the garden. Claudian was glad to be awake; the moment was delicious; he knew that he had only to let droop his drowsy lids and he would sleep again, and sleep sweetly, in that delicately odorous air. Presently in the outer silence some liquid notes were uttered; the dark walled garden, full of the night and of the bloom of lilacs and the first green of ancient trees, had found a voice; a nightingale was singing. Mr. Fairholme turned his head upon the pillow just so far that both ears might be open to the bird's music. Yesterday there had

been rain—a soft continuous rain, which had washed away the last harshness of winter—and Claudian in the rain had felt sad. Yesterday he had been expecting visitors, and it was only too likely that they would disturb his admirable life. But after the rain had come this exquisite night; and his visitors were sleeping under his old high-pitched roof; and his life seemed admirable still. Murmuring a Greek line about the nightingale, Claudian Fairholme was aware of his eyelids falling softly. *Πανδαρέου κούρη*, his lips murmured,

*χλωρῆς ἀηδῶν
Καλὸν αἰδεῖσθαι ἕαρος νέον ἱσταμένοιο,
Δενδρέων ἐν πεταλοῖσι καθεζομένη πυκνοῖσιν.*

He smiled as he tasted the freshness of the Greek words, and smiling fell asleep. The nightingale went on singing.

The morning was worthy to follow the night; a light wind, almost too gentle to be wind, came from the west to meet the dawn, and the blue of the sky was soft. In the room next to Claudian's, his guest and friend, a man of like years, turned once or twice uneasily in the morning light, and then woke with a start. He sat up in bed and stared at the

window with eyes strange and stern. His head was big and rather bald; his beard was long, untrimmed, and thin, and through the mustache one might see the sensitive lips set close together. Out in the garden, where it was a rare day for growing, there was a great babble of birds; but the good gentleman did not hear them. His ears were attentive only to the cawing of the rooks, who were seriously busy in the big elm before the window. From his bed he could behold their solemn trifling, their ponderous playfulness. Now one funereal bird and now another alighted heavily upon a slender twig which was by much too small for him. Then would he topple forward and topple backward, clumsily balancing himself until he fell off into air; then would he fly in a short circle, and come back with a caw to try a higher and a slenderer twig. "They are like parsons," cried the newly awakened gentleman, with a great voice; "ha! ha!" As he spoke aloud, the wide sensitive mouth seemed to writhe behind the thin veil of the mustache, and a sharp line appeared in one lean cheek between the long nose and the corner of the lip. His laugh seemed to mock the cawing of the

rooks which moved his merriment, but it had less dignity. He stopped his laughter short and jumped from his bed. He shouted in his bath; he rubbed himself with a rough towel as if it were a gymnastic feat. "Ha! ha!" he cried; "I am warm." He rushed about the room and got himself into his clothes.

As soon as he was dressed he ran down the old oak staircase, and well-nigh fell headlong into the cool tiled hall, where the old Persian rugs are spread. Then he tugged at the handles of the front door till by chance it opened, and he sped into the sweet air of the new day, and drew deep breaths with rapture. With long nervous fingers he tugged his thin and wavy beard; he seemed to be opening his mouth by this rather elaborate process. Then he went quickly round and about the nicely ordered shrubberies of the garden; and since the gate was locked he impetuously climbed the wall and all but dropped upon a party of small children who were playing in the lane. The children fled in amazement. To ease their fears he stood and bellowed after them, like Achilles in the trenches, but they fled the faster. So down the lane he went the other

way, for he would not frighten these unreasonable infants more; and stopping not for the scent and loveliness of hawthorn all in bloom, he came out upon the smooth green where the old Cathedral stands. There was the old Cathedral, cool and gray in the fair cool light, solid and stately, spacious and high, and enduring for generations; and there the strange visitor stood still at last, and glared. Then he shook a lean brown fist at the great Cathedral, and went back to breakfast. Though this gentleman had been a parson, the Cathedral seemed none the worse.

Claudian Fairholme came down to breakfast before the return of his old friend, but the room was not empty. There, making tea, was his old friend's daughter, very cool and pleasant to look upon, with her neat, ruffled brown head bent above the tea-pot. The window was open behind her, and on the smooth lawn were shadows of trees, and here and there a thrush took three hops and seemed to listen. Claudian stood still in the doorway with a little gasp of pleasure. It was the sort of thing he liked. A girl at a breakfast-table on a very fine morning was appropriate; he had a keen sense of the

fitness of things. This child of his old friend was almost a stranger to him. As she looked up he noticed, for the first time, that she had very pretty eyebrows. When she smiled she showed her small regular teeth; but her lip came down closely over them when she had done with her smiling: this gave her rather a determined look for one so young. She greeted Claudian Fairholme with a business-like nod; and then, as if she remembered that he was her host, she came towards him with an inquiring look about the pretty eyebrows. "I declare I forgot," she said, "that I wasn't making tea at home. I don't know what I was thinking about, for we haven't such a lovely room as this, and our tea-pot is such a battered old thing."

Claudian felt a little shy in the presence of this self-possessed young lady. It struck him that he had almost forgotten how to talk to ladies, and that this was perhaps the one unfortunate effect of that life of scholarly leisure which he had chosen for himself a few years ago. It seemed absurd that he should feel shy where a young girl showed no sign of shyness. She was not shy. She nodded to a chair as if

she would ask him to be seated ; and when he obeyed her nod, she gave him a cup of tea, that seemed even better than he gave himself on other mornings ; and yet Mr. Claudian Fairholme was very particular about his tea. She looked at him with interest, and asked him questions about the place and people ; and since he was slow in answering, she began to tell him, instead, of the place where she lived, and of the people whom she knew. It was the gossip of a quiet country neighbourhood of which he had known something in days gone by. She thought that she ought to entertain her host as well as she could. "The Blackhams had just settled to give something," she said, "when we left—theatricals or a ball—I don't know which. The Lelands have not given anything at all this year ; old Mr. Leland says he really can't afford it. Freddy and Tommy and Dicky have all muffed for the army. It's really dreadful !" She was very emphatic.

"Ah ! I remember the Lelands," said Claudian, courteously ; "a very slipshod family."

"Yes, it's quite dreadful. I can't think how they are allowed to go on so. Mrs. Leland is very

much to blame." She spoke judicially, and her upper lip expressed grave disapproval. Claudian thought that she was very funny with her verdicts, which she delivered without a trace of animosity; she spoke as if it were her duty to express an adverse opinion. She looked comically young as a moralist; but her little air of decision and her coolness were undeniably pretty. "I like Freddy Leland," she continued, "and Dicky is a nice boy. I don't like Tommy at all. I think it's a great pity that Carry is allowed to go on as she does." She looked severe; Claudian waited for further light on Carry Leland, but the moralist had set her lips, and would say no more about Carry. "Of course you heard all about the wedding," she said.

"I don't know," said Mr. Fairholme; "what wedding?"

"Delia Wentworth's," she said, with a look which was almost a rebuke. "You remember Delia Wentworth, of course."

"Is that Theodore Wentworth's daughter?"

"Of course," she said, with pity for his uncertain mind. "It was such a pretty wedding, but you never saw such a composed bride. She

wouldn't go away because she hadn't had enough breakfast!" Claudian, who was uncertain whether he was meant to express admiration or disapproval, smiled rather feebly. "Richard kept hurrying her, and she wouldn't go; and they as nearly as possible missed the train. Richard was so nice; he gave me my dog; I should have liked to bring him with me, but papa said he'd disturb you; he wouldn't have disturbed you a bit; he's the cleverest pup in the world."

"Richard?" asked Claudian, vaguely.

"Richard!" she cried, with a quick musical laugh at his vagueness, "no; my dog, which Richard gave me. Richard was the bridegroom. Isn't it wonderful that a bride can be so composed as Delia was? I know *I* shall be dreadfully frightened." Claudian looked at her with surprise, but she was quite cool and grave.

"Are you going to be married?" he asked.

She laughed again at his dulness. "I mean, whenever I am married," she said. He smiled and nodded. "Can't I do anything while I am here?" she asked, presently. "Do they have penny readings? There is a town, isn't there?"

"A very small town, and very sleepy. It sleeps under the shadow of the Cathedral. I don't think they have any readings at any price."

"What a pity!" she said. "I could have played something. Do you play?"

"I play a little," said Claudian, softly. "I am very fond of music. Do you sing?"

"I haven't sung since my cold in the winter; but we might have played duets. I get through duets very well."

This had an ominous sound in the ear of Claudian. "You get through duets?" he said, softly.

"Oh yes," she said; "if I get out in a duet, I just stop and try to get in later."

"Oh!" he said, softly.

Suddenly, as Claudian was looking idly at his fair young guest, he saw a more intent look come into her face. She had heard the front door open before he had heard it, and she knew in an instant that her father had come back. The front door was banged, there was a mighty rattling in the umbrella-stand, a quick step in the hall, and the enthusiast entered. He looked hot and tired, and the veins on his temples were even

more sharply marked than usual. He wrung his host's hand, dropped into a chair, passed a hand over his shiny skull, and then dragged his nervous fingers down through his long beard. His daughter brought him a cup of tea, and Claudian, watching her, felt sure that for all her little chat she had not forgotten to keep the tea good for her energetic parent. Claudian fancied that she regarded her father with a mixture of admiration and responsibility; he thought that she seemed even more attractive for her deeper gravity; he wondered if his old friend knew what a pretty child his daughter was.

II.

It was afternoon in Claudian's garden. The light breeze of the morning had sighed itself away, and the shrubberies were almost silent ; it was a drowsy hour. Even the enthusiast was lowered to a softer mood, though he was very much in earnest. His eyes were fixed eagerly on the friend of his youth, whom he had always admired above all other men. The friend of his youth was pensive, but interested. He felt a revival in him of that interest with which the enthusiast's schemes had inspired him in their old Oxford days. The enthusiasm of other people was always attractive to Claudian. It is true that his friend's schemes had assumed a wholly different shape ; but the enthusiasm was still there. At Oxford Ferdinand had been a High-Churchman, and had besought his friend daily and eagerly to be ordained with him, that together they might convert the world. Now

Ferdinand would shake his fist at cathedrals, and as he sat with his friend in the garden, he exhorted him to descend into the arena and fight for the sacred cause of Democracy. Democracy, a social democracy, shot through and through with poetry, was the present food on which the enthusiast nourished his enthusiasm. He was bent fiercely on loving everybody ; and woe betide the luckless wight who refused to be loved ! He thought, as he had thought in their old undergraduate days, that nothing was wanted for the triumph of his new faith but the aid of the gallant and gifted Claudian, of whom he always expected so much.

"Throw in your lot with us," he cried. "I have given up the stolid country life forever. Do the same ; come to London with me."

"I can't bear London," said Claudian, looking at the nice grass beneath his feet. "What do you expect to find in London ?"

"Men and women," said Ferdinand.

Claudian smiled faintly. "You know that I go a long way with you," he said.

"Not far enough ! Not as far as London."

"I am a natural democrat," continued Mr. Fairholme, with the smile which generally ac-

accompanied his introspection ; "I am blind to differences of rank. The finest gentleman of my acquaintance is a gipsy who passes my garden-wall every year on his way from the New Forest. He comes a little out of his way to see me ; he brings a forest freshness with him, a tonic, a flavour of Arden. I once knew a duke, and he was a snob."

"I should like to know the gipsy," said Ferdinand, with fervour ; "we might travel with him in the summer."

"You and your daughter?"

"You and I. I want to bring you down, down to the smell of the wholesome earth, to the flavour of a struggling humanity. Oh, Claudian, it's not enough to sit staring at your foot in a garden. It is time to move."

"Move? Where?"

"Everywhere ! Come and hunt your fellow-men. Track them with me to their dens and their drinking-shops, their music-halls and their beds in dry arches.' Spring upon them and swear brotherhood."

"Do you think they'd like it?"

"They would like it from you. You are the man we want ; I have known it always. With

your charm of manner you can win anybody. The drunkard, the thief, the poor scum of the gutters, would be your brothers and sisters ! ”

Claudian looked doubtful. The enthusiast went on with growing warmth: “And then, with your genius—you were always our genius, you know—you could strike the keynote and make the world ring. I don’t know how ; I won’t ask how. Only throw open your close nature, and take it all in. Take the whole world in, men and women, suffering and sinning. And when you have absorbed it all, rise up some morning and shout the battle-cry. Something great must come of it—a revolution—a book—something to change the world. It is your task, for you have the highest genius.”

Claudian was pleased ; he was glad that the admiration of his old friend had not cooled.

“Politics have belonged to a class,” said the enthusiast, after a pause ; “they must belong to humanity. They have been the game of the old ; they must be the work of the young. It is for the vigorous young man to go down and preach brotherhood in the beer-shops and blind alleys ; it is for us to awaken the people, and

with the people's strength to wrest the power from the old fossils at Westminster."

Claudian's attention had wandered a little; but he noted a phrase which pleased him. "Those old fossils at Westminster," he repeated softly, smiling. It was spring, and there stirred in Claudian Fairholme a new life and youth. He smiled at the old fossils. He felt himself a strong man and a young man. His eyes wandered away again to where, at the far end of the garden, a slight figure came from the shadows. "*Ut flos in septis*," he murmured,

*"Secretus nascitur hortis,
Ignotus pecori, nullo contusus aratro,
Quem mulcent auræ, firmat sol, educat imber—"*

"You must come to London with me," said Ferdinand; "I can do something, and you can do far more. You will be David, and I Saul; but even I can do something."

"*Multi illum pueri, multæ optavere puellæ*," murmured Claudian, whose eyes still rested on the far end of the long garden.

"Yes," continued the enthusiast, "I can do something; I have proved it. Even at Nessbor-

ough I made a disciple ; you'll see him to-night."

"What?" asked Claudian, whose attention was attracted abruptly.

"Didn't I tell you about Arthur Leeson? It has been very interesting. You would have thought him a mere butterfly; he acted and danced and had a ridiculous little tenor voice. But now he has felt the faith, and is changed. For the last two months at Nessborough he came to me almost daily. He asked to be allowed to come here; I couldn't refuse my disciple."

"But I fear my little house is full," said Claudian, who could not bear to be inhospitable.

"He will sleep anywhere," said the enthusiast, with conviction; "anywhere—under a haystack or the eternal stars—anywhere. He has felt the divine fury too; he—ah! Look! by Cæsar, the coincidence is amazing! He is here!" The enthusiast looked at his friend with triumph, as if Arthur Leeson had been brought from heaven by a democratic eagle. Claudian lifted his eyes and saw the young man coming over the smooth grass. He looked with inter-

est, for he was an amateur of youth. He had liked always to watch a young man halting on the border of the world of men, his foot delaying and his heart yet tender with the dreams of boyhood : he had pleased himself with wondering whither this one or that would go in this "bright pathetic world."

As he looked at this young man, whose step was light on the grass, he said to himself that his looks at least were in his favour. He had a manner gay and confident, a little silky mustache, and an attractive smile. He pressed Ferdinand's lean hand in his ; and then he turned to Claudian with a manner eloquent of apology. "Don't get up, I beg," he said ; "please don't disturb yourself." He had more manner than most young Englishmen—but this is not a strong statement. With his close-cropped dark head and the thin black line on his upper lip, he was not unlike a foreigner, and he was apt to move his hands a little as he spoke. "One must respect one's seniors," he continued, smiling—"grave and reverend seniors." He looked from one to the other like a man who expects to be fascinating. Claudian expressed pleasure at his coming, and Arthur Leeson held up his hand in

deprecation. "I must pay my respects to your daughter," he said, lightly, to Ferdinand. Claudian thought that the new-comer was too like a light comedian. He looked after him as he walked away towards the garden's bound. He did not like the back view. He said to himself that the back of this young man's head was poor and the ears coarse. Even the enthusiast showed no excessive elation at the coming of his one disciple. When his eyes met Claudian's both men looked away with a guilty feeling; for each was conscious that he had looked to see if the other showed any marks of age. The playful phrase "grave and reverend seniors" was in the thoughts of both; and to Claudian at least there suddenly recurred that other speech of the enthusiast about "old fossils."

III.

"WHY, Onions," he said, slapping his manly thigh, "'ow ever are yer? I never should have known yer! What have yer done to yer whiskers?"

The young man thus playfully addressed as "Onions" made no reply to the question of the whiskers. He was of a cautious character, and he suspected that some irony lurked under this interest in a delicate and pampered growth. He looked sideways at his friend Henry under the curly brim of his hat, and replied curtly to the question of his health.

"I'm toppin', thank ye," he said.

Then the two young friends looked at each other in silence, but with a knowing air, as if each were playfully considering where he should hit the other; and then Henry, who was of the most festive nature, nodded sideways to a plate-glass window adorned with a picture of a cat and a barrel, and another of a popular comedian,

and "Shall we adjourn?" asked he. The cautious Onions was nothing loath.

The two friends turned out of the crowded thoroughfare, where the lamps showed dull in the air of a rather foggy evening; and as the door swung behind them they were in the glare of the gas. A long narrow slit of a room ran backward from the street, and seemed to be more than half filled by the counter, with its row of tall white china handles all shining in the yellow light. Behind these brilliant handles stood Polly, and stood idle too, for all the long narrow slit before the counter was empty. All the men in the place had passed on through the open door into the close little room beyond. Henry greeted Polly with a jaunty familiarity which did not drive away the slight cloud from her brow. She drew a glass for him and another for Onions, who had left the ordering, as he meant to leave the treating, to his friend. Henry was raising his glass with a friendly wink, when he stopped short. From the inner room a fine voice burst suddenly into eloquence.

"Gormed if there ain't that old parson again!" cried Henry, with enthusiasm.

"Yes; and a sin and a shame it is, too," said Polly," to make game of the poor gentleman."

There was a babble of voices when the poor gentleman burst into deep-toned eloquence, but it stopped in a moment with a few isolated cries of "'Ear 'im!" "'Old your bloomin' noise!" and with some cheerful encouragement addressed to him as "Johnny" or "Guv'nor," for 'they all knew by experience that to call him "Parson" was to dry up the current of his strange eloquence. It was the enthusiastic Ferdinand who was speaking, and the enthusiast was in his most enthusiastic mood. He had passed beyond the bounds even of zealous exhortation. He was magniloquent, almost poetical; his chant verged on the dithyrambic.

"Even the duke is a man," he was saying, "and the poacher. We must not despise the duke nor the poacher. And the duchess is a woman, and so, for all their high heels and their laces, are the beautiful ladies in their drawing-rooms. At night I stand in the crowd on the pavement; I feel myself pushed and jostled by the rude crowd; and I am happy. A striped awning is stretched from the doorway, and the beautiful ladies walk in, gracious,

lovely, with diamonds and laces; and they too are my sisters. A stately man-servant stands by the door with his hair powdered, calm, polite; and he is my brother. In the scullery is a maid-servant with a dirty apron washing dishes. The musicians begin to play in the white saloon; the countesses are dancing. They and the scullery-girl are sisters; they too are of the joy of the whole earth." Henry nudged Onions; he had never heard the old gentleman in such force. The room was full of young men of the same stamp. As Ferdinand paused they rattled their glasses. "Let the countesses work in the kitchen, and let the kitchen-maid dance to the fiddles," continued the enthusiast, "turn and turn about. There is nothing beautiful but work. It is the dignity of honest labour which I proclaim. I see the labourer in the field: he straightens his back and lifts his eyes to the setting sun; the hour of rest comes; he wipes his brow with the back of his hand, and pushes up the short wet hair. His sister washes plates in the kitchen; she too is dignified and beautiful." Henry winked at the cautious and irresponsible Onions, and then distributed winks about the

room as the enthusiast became eloquent again. "Nothing is vile," he cried; "my body is not vile. I am delighted with my body: that, at least, is divine. I strip myself naked on the sea-sand; I breathe deep of the salt of the sea; I shout to the strong wind, my brother, and to the sea-gull, my sister. The salt wind kisses me; I fling open my strong arms; I embrace the joy of the world; I feel that all men are my brothers. I will go into the slums and find them; I will push myself into palaces and exclusive clubs and find them. Everywhere will I seek my brothers. Beauty is not for the few, but for the many. I promise to you all beauty, and truth, and love." Visions of Margate floated before the eyes of the young men; they murmured applause.

The enthusiast was intoxicated by the vigour and rhythm of his own language. He had forgotten where he was and to whom he spoke; he seemed to be addressing the Universe; he abandoned himself to a divine influence; he was but vaguely conscious of the rappings and murmurs of applause. All around him, filling the tawdry room, were young men lolling at ease, and the smoke of cheap cigars and the

fumes of brandy and water. The young men took their pleasure rather gravely, wearing for the most part a merely knowing air and a look of contempt for the rhapsodist; but ever and anon, when something in his speech admitted of a double meaning, one or other would utter a hoarse croak, and the slow wink went round.

The enthusiast, now fairly launched on the full tide of extraordinary eloquence, might have chanted his democratic strain for an hour more; but he was interrupted by the arrival of his daughter. The young girl, who was dressed in her darkest clothes, came quickly in from the crowded street, and, after one inquiring glance, which Polly, from behind the counter, answered with a sympathetic nod, walked straight into the room where her father was instructing the generation. She had been there before and she was not afraid. Moreover, she was not unattended; she was followed by Arthur Leeson. The young man's dress-clothes were covered by an overcoat, of which the collar was turned up; his face was anxious and annoyed; one could see that he had not half finished his expostulations. The girl never flinched before the atmosphere of strong

drink and cheap smoke; she did not seem to notice the critical looks of the youth. She went straight to her father, and touched his arm with authority. The enthusiast stopped short in his speech, and stared at the girl. Then in a moment, as if he remembered who she was, and forgot where they both were, he tapped her cheek pleasantly. "Is it time already?" "Yes," she answered. "Well," he said, looking round him with a large friendliness, "I dare say I shall find my friends here to-morrow."

A strange silence had fallen on his audience. They had not changed their easy lounging attitudes, but yet there was a certain constraint; for all their knowledge of the world, the presence of this soberly clad young lady made them shy. Some muttered in answer to the enthusiast, and others laughed rather awkwardly. Arthur Leeson glared and bit his lip; he was disgusted; he had danced attendance in the place on other nights, but it became more and more distasteful to him. As he parted from the girl on the door-step of her temporary home, he asked with impressiveness, "When can I see you to-morrow morning?" She

looked at him for a moment, thinking; then she named an hour, and followed her father, who was eagerly but vainly seeking the match-box in the umbrella-stand.

IV.

THE girl was moving about the room and putting things in their places when Arthur Leeson came. She had made the shabby London lodgings almost pretty by her little arts. She looked grave as she heard the young man's light step on the stair. As she opened the door for him, she held her finger on her lips: her father was sleeping heavily in the next room after a night made restless by the excitement of his evening bursts of oratory. Arthur, who had walked nimbly from his home rehearsing persuasive speeches by the way, was put out by this necessity of speaking in a low tone, on which he had not counted. But after a moment he recovered himself, and even felt that he could be doubly tender and persuasive as he almost whispered in the girl's ear. He had decided, as he came, that he would begin by speaking of her looks. "You look tired," he said, as she drew her hand from his.

"Thanks ; I'm perfectly well. You want to speak to me about something?"

As she asked the question rather curtly, he put up his two white hands with tender deprecation. "I wish I had the right to speak to you without reserve," he said.

"You may say just what you like, Arthur. I am sure you won't mind my setting the room to rights while you talk."

She began to move about again, and he followed her gently with a great deal of tender interest in his expressive eyes. Presently he sighed ; and then, with the air of one who puts aside all lighter thoughts and faces the difficult problem like a man, he began to speak. His speech was in the happy mean between ease and solemnity.

"I do wish," he said, "that you would give up following your dear father to these places. Ah ! don't speak yet," he added more quickly, for she had turned upon him with a set face. "Don't speak yet," he begged ; "you must think how impossible it is for you to continue running about in these dreadful places, among these dreadful people. You don't mind my speaking about this ? I felt that I must say

it." He was like a persuasive doctor with a nervous patient, or soft young school-master with a self-willed pupil; he felt himself full of sweet reasonableness.

"You may say just what you like," she said; "it won't alter me in the least. As long as my father chooses to go to these places, I shall go to fetch him. There is no one else to bring him home. I can't think how you should suppose for a moment that I should not go to find my father."

"A young lady—alone! You know that such a thing has never been heard of."

"Then it will be heard of now," she said, with a laugh which was unnaturally high. "I suppose you've come to tell me that you won't come with me any more. Of course you know best about that; you are perfectly at liberty as far as I am concerned."

"My dear—my dear, I do wish—I do wish you would listen to a little reason about it." He smiled tenderly as he offered this suggestion.

"I don't wish to listen to reason. Really, it's not the least use talking to me about this. I should be very much to blame if I did not do

as I do. I know perfectly well what is my plain duty; there's no more to be said." She looked him straight in the face, and after a moment's silence she added, "I must understand, then, that you won't come with me any more."

"It is terribly perplexing and painful," he said; "you must see that it has an extraordinary look. I might get the worst reputation at the office."

"I don't pretend to judge for you. You would be very much to blame if you came with me when you didn't think it right."

He stood silent for a minute with a look of regret and perplexity, and then he spoke again with becoming hesitation. "If I only might hope," he said—"if you would allow me only a little hope that you might some day reward me—make me the happiest of men?" He seemed to expand into a beaming and radiant lover as he uttered the familiar phrase; he seemed to be speaking across the foot-lights.

She looked at him with grave surprise for man's weakness. "You promised me not to talk of that again until I gave you leave. I can't think how you can speak of it to me now;

you know perfectly well that I will not think of anything but of my father, till he gives up this——this——”

“Ah ! I see that you are determined to mis-judge me,” he said, sadly.’

“I don’t wish to judge you at all ; I think that everybody must judge for himself. I only want to know just where I am. If I can’t count on you any more, I must take the housemaid with me when I have to go out in the evening, or go alone.”

“You can’t go alone,” he said, quickly ; “it’s out of the question. Only think what might be said.”

She allowed herself to smile a little with a slight disdain. “You will be late at the office,” she said.

He had an admirable temper. He still looked at her with mute expostulation. “It is terrible for me too,” he said ; but she only smiled again. There was sorrow in his tone, though not more than is consonant with genteel comedy ; he was no longer sprightly ; his neat figure drooped, expressive of regret. “It is terrible,” he said again ; “it has been noticed at the office.”

“Then I shan’t expect you this evening.”

"I don't know what to say."

"It is quite enough if you think you ought not to come. I can't think why you should hesitate. Of course you must do what you think right."

"I am so dreadfully sorry," he murmured. "I do hope you will think better of it, and give up this—this running about in these dreadful places. Will you promise to send for me if I — I am so dreadfully sorry." He slid out of the room ; he almost fell on the narrow dark staircase ; he was dreadfully upset.

"I can't think," she said to herself, "how men can be so—so——" She could not finish her sentence ; she stamped her little foot on the threadbare carpet, and then her firm lip began to quiver like a little child's. Her eyes were full of tears, but she pressed her hands on them with all her might, and when she took them away her cheek and forehead were white with their pressure. She smoothed her hair at the glass, and found some comfort in the process. She was not surprised. She had recognized the possibility of this desertion, and had determined what she should do next if Arthur Leeson failed her. Without a minute's delay, she got out the telegraph-form which she had kept ready for

this emergency. "Please come to my father," she wrote. Then she took a shilling from her little store, put on her bonnet, and hurried to the neighbouring office, whence she despatched her telegram to that old friend of her father, Mr. Claudian Fairholme.

As, when a small steam-launch with shudder and noise and black smoke has jerked and hurried through a tranquil reach of Thames, far behind it the stream is still disturbed with long heavings, so after the visit of his old friend and his old friend's daughter was the peaceful life of Claudian Fairholme moved by slow waves of recollection. The studies which had absorbed him lost their charm; he began to wonder for the first time if it were really worth while to complete another translation of the Odes of Horace. He did not sleep so well as usual; but, though he woke in the middle of the night, he did not hear the nightingale. As the summer grew warmer and richer, the songs of birds were rare, and the nightingale was dumb. *Χλωροῖς ἀηδών*, murmured the wakeful Claudian, but from the thick leaves of trees no bird, daughter of Pandaros, Hellenic romantic and modern, would charm the listening ear of Master Faustus Fair-

holme. Some trouble had touched Claudian, and the deep joy of summer was tremulous with a deeper melancholy. He began to wonder if men grew old more quickly in solitude. Once in a quiet corner he assured himself that his gardener was not near, and then quickly and breathlessly vaulted over a gate. After that he felt better for a time. He had never thought about losing his youth, and now he supposed that he had lost it. Certainly he could not class himself with Arthur Leeson; and after all he did not wish to, only he began to ask himself whether his excellent gardener would be a wholly adequate companion of his declining years. When he found that he looked at his honest and sober gardener with a certain distaste, he felt sure that something was wrong with him; he wondered if he needed change of air. Sitting listless in his garden with his long legs stretched out before him, Claudian was debating where he should seek change, when he saw his servant coming with a telegram. "Please comb to my feather," was written therein; but Claudian, who is a very clever man, understood the message in a moment. He gathered himself together and stood upright; he squared his shoulders

and looked at the man with eyes which were slowly growing brighter.

“Pack clothes for a week,” he said, and “borrow the Dean’s dog-cart. I go to London by the next train.”

V.

It was a great evening in the little room behind the bar. The chance customer who turned out of the crowded street to ask Polly for a glass glanced with curiosity at the closed door, from beyond which came the sound of a full voice, rising and falling with a monotonous singsong. The voice was the voice of the enthusiast, or at least was strangely like it. Certainly the enthusiast was not speaking; he could not have spoken if he would. He sat with his wild eyes fixed on the talented declaimer, as if the maintenance of his self-control depended on the fixity of his gaze. Even in that atmosphere of smoke and spirits and genial humanity, his face was cold and gray. The line in his cheek was sharp as if cut with a knife, and the lips behind their thin transparent veil of mustache were pressed together with a constant effort. Even yet he could

hardly believe his ears. It seemed impossible that these young men, on whom he had been sure that he was exercising an ennobling influence, had got in a fellow to mock him. He had been confident that he was winning the hearts and teaching the minds of the young men of the people: he awoke in the midst of red or sodden faces, grinning over the new turn of the joke. And the joke was not wholly bad. The talented youth whom the enthusiast's friends had brought in was well worthy of those music-hall honours for which he longed. His cheeks and chin were fat and swarthy; his body was round and short; he might have been fed from the cradle on sausages and mashed potato. His little shiny mustache, though it grew on his upper lip, had the appearance of a theatrical property. He bore himself with a great deal of dignity; it was only his right eye which was permitted to twinkle. Among his mates he had a great reputation; and when he had sat quiet in a corner for two evenings, he was able to offer a remarkable imitation of the enthusiast in his more inspired moments. He avoided his model's eyes, while his own right eye moved round the room and collected the re-

spectful sympathy of his friends. His friends beamed and chuckled in the heated atmosphere. "Let the wise man," the humorist was saying—"let the wise man shut his mouth, and let the bloomin' idiot go up on the platform! Let the judge stand in the dock and think, and let the habitual criminal have a turn at the judge's wig! O Law Courts old and new, O policemen, O police vans, O police horses, should we not all have a turn with you? Duchesses throng around me; they beg me to dance with them; they go on their knees to me; I will dance with the duchesses. I will dance too with the chimney-sweeps. The chimney-sweep shall dance with the duchess; I will *balancer* opposite with the scullery-girl. Adieu and *au revoir*, O enchanting scullery-girl! Let us meet again at the Marble Arch, for that too is divine."

The rhapsodist paused, and there was a burst of laughter and applause, the tinkling of glasses, and a rush of admiring comments. Only Ferdinand seemed to have no proper appreciation of the humour: in humour there is every variety of taste.

"Covent Garden Market!" said the per-

former, in the enthusiast's most impressive tone—"Covent Garden Market! Onions, potatoes, carrots, turnips, parsnips, asparagus French and English (*O bon jour*, French asparagus, my brother)! Good vegetables and bad musty vegetables! Good sellers and bad musty sellers! And yet are the bad musty good, or better than the good. I devour the bad musty vegetables. O bouquets for misses and for the opera-girls! Empty wagons and full wagons, empty baskets and full baskets, empty people and full people! O Covent Garden Market! O dirt and smell and slime indescribable! I describe you all, I love you all, I wallow in you all. I too am a vegetable. I am likewise an animal, and an angel. Cool and sweet is the dewy grass and the shore of the sea. Cool and sweet is the crowded London street. I strip myself naked in the grass, on the shore of the sea, in the crowded street. I am free and naked; the policemen run me in. Them also do I call brothers!"

There was a howl of laughter led by the most humorous and intelligent of the party. Ferdinand looked round for the first time, and his eyes were full of agony; he hid his face in

his hands. A minute later he started at a touch on his shoulder; he looked up and saw his daughter, and he tried to smile. The girl, standing straight with her hand upon her father's shoulder, looked round on the assembly with open dislike and scorn. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" she cried, with a stamp of her little foot. Some of the young men sniggered; and Claudian Fairholme, who had stopped a moment by the open door, strode to the girl's side, on fire with a wild wish to decrease the urban population. Into his mind came stirring words—"Over my head his arm he flung against the world." He was ashamed of feeling heroic, but he wanted to shake somebody into unconsciousness for only daring to look at her. And they did look at her, all those reddened or pallid boys with mean eyes. She cared nothing for their looking, all her care was for her father; she helped him to his feet and began to lead him away. Yet she could not help looking prettier for the flush of anger, and the young men stared at her from under their hat-brims, bold, yet ashamed, ashamed of their shame, and on the verge of proving their superiority to women by some

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the police. Claudian laughed aloud, and came back a step to wring Polly's hand.

"There, get along, do!" said the maiden, and Claudian went.

Outside there was a four-wheeled cab, and the girl was waiting to see if he were safe.

"I will come and see how he is to-morrow," said Mr. Fairholme, at the cab window; and there looked out at him a little face illumined by the gas-light, and he saw that tears were shining on the long eyelashes.

"Curse me!" said Claudian, in his teeth, as he strode down the street and felt his eyes wink. He was English enough to swear at himself when he found that he was a man of sensibility.

VI.

CLAUDIAN gave all his time and the best of his thoughts to the help of his old friend and school-fellow. Before Ferdinand had recovered from his crushing blow he was carried away from London; and when he looked up again and felt the first slight interest in his whereabouts, he was in the best arm-chair of Mr. Fairholme's study. His daughter was amazed by Claudian's energy, and declared again and again that she could do nothing for her father. Again and again she suggested, though somewhat faintly, that they should finish their visit, but she was met by the firm refusal of her host. It appeared that he would even detain them by force, and risk the legal consequences. Even his gardener, busy in the high-walled academic garden, felt that a change had come over Mr. Claudian Fairholme.

Claudian attended the enthusiast with unceas-

ing devotion and consummate tact. He gave him silence and rest ; he followed his excellent cook into her very kitchen, with directions and prescriptions of food ; he gathered from a mass of journals every tale which showed that somewhere in the world of struggling men and women were virtue and valour and love. When his friend was in his darkest mood he left him alone. Gradually the dark moods grew shorter and less dark. Slowly the enthusiasm crept back to the enthusiast, and the shadow of despondency passed slowly away. And then Claudian made his great suggestion. He proposed that Ferdinand should express his political faith in a big book, and asked that he might be allowed to be a fellow-worker with his old friend. The heart of the enthusiast leaped up like fire. The dream of his boyhood had been that Claudian and he should do some noble work together. He had never doubted that his friend had genius, and that with him he might move the world. Mountains seemed a little thing ; it was the world which was to be shoved a little in the right direction. After all, there was nothing like a book. A book, as Claudian said, might be read by millions. Perhaps not at once, as Claudian ad-

mitted, but if not to-day, then to-morrow ; if not to-morrow, in fifty years. Perhaps centuries hence it might instruct and cheer a brighter and a better generation. There was to be a book ; that was a great fact, and who could dare to limit its possible influence ? The enthusiast's eye grew bright again. He looked afar off, and beheld the procession of the ages, while Claudian pushed silently under his nose the most tempting paper and a bundle of the best quill pens. So the two friends went to work at the big book, and the enthusiast throve on it like a silkworm on a mulberry leaf. Like a spider of genius he sat and spun a beautiful and symmetrical web, which seemed like woven moonshine, while Claudian brought fragments of old books and new journals for his nourishment. And Claudian worked well and cheerfully, and found his weekly wages in the growing vigour of his friend and the gradual effacement of the sharp lines in his cheek. And if Ferdinand was so full of zeal that he never thought of gratitude, he had a daughter who was grateful, and who made no secret of it, but spoke her thanks and wonder frankly and prettily.

It was well that Claudian Fairholme found

his reward in the growing health of his friend ; for while the faith of the enthusiast waxed with each day's work, the faith of his colleague waned. Each morning he felt more and more like an aeronaut's boy whose privilege it was to fill the big balloon. Very like to a big balloon seemed the book on which he worked so zealously. In the book was an ideal society—a world as it ought to be.

"All men shall be born free," said Ferdinand. "All men shall be equal," said Ferdinand. "Each man shall love all other men with a love just less by one hundredth part than the love which he has for himself." This arrangement was necessary to prevent an extravagant society in which A sacrificed himself with passion to B, B to C, and C to A, every man pursuing his neighbour with loathed benefits, and flying in terror from his neighbour's kindness. The enthusiast demanded but three laws, and he would show you a world in which it was worth while to live. Only three small anchors were needed for the big balloon ; but the anchors seemed to Claudian to be fixed in the morning dew, and he looked that the balloon, being full of gas, would float beyond the earth's attraction

and into the rare atmosphere of Saturn, where, as a great orator knows, general propositions about human action are absolutely true. Claudian, after helping with the bellows, found it necessary to go into the village and talk to the men and women, or to the boys and girls ; or to go to afternoon service in the great Cathedral, or—and this was best of all—to discuss household affairs and her father's health with the enthusiast's daughter. For the rest, he grew more and more firm in the belief that no man could be free, that no two men were equal, and that the love for your neighbour could not be always the same, nor measured with a nice exactitude like doctor's stuff. Such indeed was the effect of his labours, that at some moments he was inclined to go straight into Parliament, and there and then to take his part in the tinkering which a healthy, ancient, and illogical society so frequently demands. He was glad as a boy that the big book did his friend so much good ; he swore to himself that he would spare himself no effort till it was finished ; and he registered another secret vow that the big book should be published—at his own expense, if necessary—and that the enthusiast should

never know. So months rolled away, and the great work grew. Nor was this the only thing which grew, for when the nightingale came back there was love too in the garden.

The girl was a little impatient. She had been moving about with a basket and garden-scissors till she was tired of being alone. She pulled off her little gauntleted glove, and pulled it on again; she stood still and looked at the open window of the study. Then Claudian came out through the window, and her lip showed her little white teeth, and she put down her basket that she might put both the little garden gloves into his big hands.

"How is he getting on?" she asked, with the pretty eyebrows raised.

"Like a house on fire," said Claudian, looking down at her with pride.

"I never should have believed it—never!" she remarked, emphatically.

"What shouldn't you have believed?"

"That I should let *anybody* take care of him for me." She nodded towards the study.

"And take care of you too," he suggested. "Do you remember," he added, as they moved away down the garden, "the morning when

you came here first, and made tea for me, and told me all the gossip about our friends at Nessborough, about dances, and pups, and boys, and weddings ? ”

“ I was very shy,” she said, gravely, “ and that was why.”

“ Oh, you were shy, were you ? I thought it was I who was shy.”

“ How silly ! ” she said ; “ how could you be shy ? You are——”

“ An old man,” he suggested. “ You didn’t think then that you would promise to marry an old man, did you ? Do you remember how you abused some girl for being too composed a bride ? ”

“ It must have been Delia Wentworth,” she said. “ I never did see any one so calm ; but I am sure I didn’t abuse her. You ought not to say that I ever abuse anybody.”

“ I wonder if you will be a beautifully composed bride, or will exhibit a becoming agitation. What is the proper manner for an elderly bridegroom ? ”

She looked up at him not smiling at all. “ I think you are exceedingly silly,” she said ; “ it’s very wrong of you to call yourself old.”

"I am old enough to be your father."

"That has nothing to do with it." As she looked up at him, she remembered the swaying youth in his fist, and her lips relaxed into a smile.

"I am young," he said; "I am absurdly young; I am just twenty. As for you, you are not grown up, I hope; you are absurdly small; you are too small to be married in a big cathedral."

She deigned to return no answer. Presently the enthusiast came to the study window and looked into the garden. He stood staring and drawing the fingers of his left hand down through his long thin beard; but neither his daughter nor his devoted friend saw him. Nor did they care, as they strolled together in the monastic garden, whether a nightingale were singing or a goose cackling. The wonder and the beauty of the world touched the heart of the enthusiast, and his eyes were filled with tears.

A CHILD OF SCIENCE.

A CHILD OF SCIENCE.

I.

It seems best to begin the story of the boy Eugenius at the moment of his first introduction to my dear old friend Oliver Roundel.

Oliver was fond of shows, and having nothing to do on a fine warm evening of summer he walked out with his hands in his pockets to look at a fire. There was a great crowd in the street ; and Noll, who hated other people's elbows, remained on the outskirts. He was not quite easy until he had learned that there was nobody in the burning house ; but then with his broad back against the palings of the square he gave himself up to quiet contemplation of closely packed black humanity and the mighty leaping flaunting fire beyond. Suddenly there was a panic, a cry that the engines were coming,

a great movement of the crowd where movement had seemed impossible, a hoarse roar and a shrill cry, and something flew over the heads of the crowd and struck the peaceful Oliver full in the ample waistcoat. Instinctively he clasped the bundle to him, and withdrawing himself a little further from the throng he found that it was a baby—a baby with an unusually large head. It was the unusually large head which had struck the good gentleman so shrewd a blow.

I need hardly say that Mr. Roundel's first object was to find the previous owner of the baby; but the crowd melted away as the fire sank into blackness, and left Noll standing there with the baby and with two impressions. The one impression was of the bulk of the infant's head (he could still feel the blow); the other was that, at the moment when the precious parcel was hurtling through the air, he had seen a white wild face flash in the common darkness of the crowd. The more Noll thought of this face, the more sure was he that it was the face of the parcel's mother. He sought this face everywhere, as the people flowed away by different channels, but he sought it in vain.

And now a portentous thing happened. So far the baby had behaved beautifully. Deprived of breath perhaps by its rapid flight through air, stunned by collision with my portly friend, or meditating some profound scientific theory, it had been passive in its protector's arm, and silent. But now a cry came from this intrusive infant, and Mr. Roundel looked about him in alarm. Not too well acquainted with the habits of the species, he was holding the infant in one arm with its tender face unduly pressed against his broadcloth, when from that hidden countenance arose the cry, which to the startled ears of Oliver seemed to fill the city. He looked around him in alarm: the place was almost empty: only a policeman and an experienced matron were near at hand.

"Rabbit the man!" said the matron to the policeman. "Whatever is he doing with a sucking child?"

"Good heavens!" cried Oliver, holding the infant from him and gazing at it with new wonder and alarm.

"How did you come into possession of that infant?" asked the policeman, fixing the eye of professional suspicion on my friend.

"What am I to do with it?" asked Oliver, helplessly.

"Take him to his mother," said the matron.

"But it hasn't got a mother," said Noll.

"He must have had a mother," said she, with feminine love of argument.

"I think I had better take him up," said the policeman, eying the baby sternly. "He's stopping the way; he's creating a disturbance; he's using the most audacious language to a constable in the performance of his dooty."

The baby was certainly making a dreadful noise; and though Mr. Roundel patted it on the head and said "Cootsey, cootsey," which he had always understood to have a soothing effect upon the young, the process was of no avail.

Noll would not for a moment consent that the baby should be taken up by the police. It seemed to him unfair that a man should begin his life by being taken up. To the matron he lent a more willing ear; and, when he had explained to her satisfaction his possession of the embarrassing parcel, she was kind enough to point out where a superior sort of infants' hub-bubble might be bought, and to give him a list of rival foods which might be tried upon the

tender babe. She even superintended the first experimental meal in the parlour behind a neighbouring shop, and sent Noll home in a cab with the infant sleeping peacefully on his arm.

Oliver Roundel, good simple soul, thought that he had but taken in a helpless lodger for a night or two. He pictured the mother seeking her babe at least as eagerly as he was seeking the mother. He advertised and awaited with confidence the answer to his advertisement; he employed a detective and expected a romantic discovery; and all the while he perambulated the streets, as he loved to do, regarding with his large honest gaze the faces of the passing crowd. And at last he almost grasped success. Turning placidly from the contemplation of Mr. Attenborough's window in the Strand, he found himself close to the face which he had seen wild and white in the crowd. The face was no longer wild, but it was still white. With a gasp like that of a large fish, Noll put forth his hand and arrested the owner of the face. "Here you are," said he; and then in a moment he added "You are my baby's mother!" The white face went quickly backward, while alarm leaped into it; but Noll pressed forward zealously. "Don't

attempt to deny," he said, "that you are my baby's mother."

"You are mad," stammered the other; "let me go."

The sound of the voice amazed Oliver Roundel. His eyes fell of themselves from the face to the feet of the speaker: there was a watch-chain and then trousers: it was a man. Noll saw that there was a mistake somewhere; he felt that he owed an apology, and began to explain his possession of an unclaimed infant. As he spoke, signs of new intelligence twitched in the white face opposite. "Yes, yes, I see, I see," said the nervous gentleman: "I threw the baby."

"Then," cried Oliver, open-mouthed—"then you are the mother."

"Certainly not! No, no, no, no! I had the infant from one, who had it from another, who had it from a third——"

"What?" interrupted Noll, incredulous.

"It was chucked," said the stranger, "along the top of the crowd from one to another, and so it came to me, and I chucked it to a fat man outside the crowd."

"That must have been me," said Oliver

Roundel, surveying his waistcoat thoughtfully. "But then," he added presently, "where was the mother?"

"Flat, for all that I know," said the white-faced man: "there was an ugly rush."

"Poor dear, poor dear!" said Noll, after a minute. "Women should not take their babies into crowds."

"Very likely not—excuse me—I'm in a hurry—important affair." He tried to slip past Mr. Roundel, but by this time a new idea had come to that sensible gentleman. He firmly took hold of a button of the stranger's coat and said, "It seems to me that you have a prior claim to the baby: you had it first."

"I waive it," cried the stranger, and jerking his coat-button from Noll's fingers he disappeared from the street with incredible agility.

II.

AFTER his adventure with the white-faced stranger in the Strand, my friend Oliver grasped the truth that the baby, whom he had regarded as a passing acquaintance, might remain with him a lifelong boarder. Mr. Roundel's establishment in Albion Street consisted of his own man, Mr. Biffen, who knew all his ways, and of two women, a cook and a housemaid. The two maids, under the fatherly eye of Mr. Biffen, made many but kindly experiments on the young Eugenius. Oliver called the boy "Eugenius" because he had been born to him, as it were, by a splendid birth of fire. And so he began to look on Eugenius as a real possession; and, though he still advertised at intervals, and made inquiries now and then at the Private Inquiry Office, he began to look out for a permanent nurse for a permanent baby.

It was a fine sight to see the good Mr. Roundel receiving nurses. He was courteous and

kind, but very particular; and more solemn than at any previous hour of his career. He was solemn as if he were choosing a prime minister or a cook—and indeed he was very particular about his food and about the shade of politics which he preferred. There was always a very fine moderation about Oliver Roundel. Nurse after nurse passed before his kind judicial eyes and did not content him. He preached patience to himself, and at last he was satisfied. One morning there came to him a young woman, self-possessed and quiet, and giving the name of Hannah Marsden. When I asked Oliver why he had accepted this young woman as nurse for his baby, he began to look for his reasons, and startled me by finding no better one than that she had no character. Hannah had not been in service before: there was nobody to whom she could refer: she had no relations nor friends. Oliver had liked her looks; she had wished to come; and there she was installed with her box, very neat and quiet, and taking excellent care of the baby. It was no affair of mine: my friend was satisfied; and I was obliged to confess that the nurse looked good.

Eugenius was an extraordinary infant. He refused to grow fat. Divers foods, all extensively advertised, were tried upon him; and at last a patient ass was found by the devoted Biffen. Even the ass was comparatively ineffective. The baby would not grow up to his head. There was the head, impressive, excessive, a great fact; but Eugenius would not grow up to it. Hannah Marsden watched him day after day, and was made anxious by this want of proportion. At last she found her opportunity, and directed Mr. Roundel's attention to the baby's head. "Dear, dear!" said Oliver, "what's to be done? Can't you keep it down in some way?"

Hannah Marsden shook her own smooth head in answer. She was very respectful, but she knew what she wanted; and before the end of the interview it was settled that a great doctor, a weighty authority, should sit on the baby's head.

Noll was now seriously uneasy about the extraordinary head. He could not make up his mind if its great size were due to intellect or to water on the brain; and he decided at once that the very highest authority should answer

the question. The very highest authority came on the appointed day, and looked long at the young patient. After much thought he said that the abnormal development might be the effect of any one of three causes. Thus, in consideration of the sum of two guineas, he added one more doubt to the doubts of Mr. Oliver Roundel.

Hannah Marsden, who had been pressing her hands together while the learned physician spoke, asked modestly if the decision of the question of cause involved any change in the baby's treatment; and being assured that it involved none, she asked again if the decision might not be left to time. A light broke in upon Oliver Roundel. It was clear to him, and to the learned physician also, that the boy Eugenius would show in due time if he were wiser or only more aqueous than his fellows. Oliver pointed out to the doctor that this was a very sensible woman, and that she went far to confirm his theory of the practical sagacity of the so-called weaker sex. He beamed on Hannah with new approval.

And soon all doubts were removed. The baby began to take notice—to take so much notice,

and at so early an age, that it was clear that the brain was in proportion to the noble skull. He was no dimpled infant, gurgling and smiling at the ceiling like a fat bishop in ecstasy. He looked critically on the world, or lay thinking like a bottle-fed Galileo; and when he began to crawl he crawled slowly, but with perseverance after fresh knowledge. Hannah was grieved because he never cried; and, if he ever lamented without tears, he seemed to lament the necessary limits of knowledge. The unknowable is very close around us when we explore upon all-fours. Eugenius did not walk early: he had a fatal tendency to turn over on to his abnormal head. But yet he grew perceptibly, though he could not grow up to his head. He grew, and at last he walked on two legs; and, crawling or walking, he showed plainly enough that he was an infant of surprising intelligence.

I must not delay with the surprising baby. The surprising baby became a surprising child. Easily contented with food, he was always hungry for information. His nurse, who soon showed that she had enjoyed a good education, answered ten thousand questions, and saw him

still agape like an unfledged sparrow. And soon there came a trying time for the easy Oliver Roundel. He could not go out of his bed-room in the morning but he found that stick of a boy arrayed in a blue-checked pinafore and awaiting information. The worst of it was that he asked the wrong questions. Noll was considered a person of much miscellaneous information; but he could not tell the inquiring child why fire burned, or what the poker was made of; and, on the other hand, Eugenius cared not a jot for Alfred and his cakes, or Tell and his apple.

Eugenius grew rapidly, and the remarkable head seemed daily farther from the ground. He became more and more like a cocoa-nut on the top of a stick, and for the world I would not have taken him to a regatta or a race-meeting, for playful persons practising at knock-'em-downs might have made a very natural mistake. It seemed as if Nature had got hold of a wrong idea of the child growing up to his head. Of course I saw but little of the perplexing infant; but I saw clearly enough that Oliver Roundel, whom I met almost daily at the club, was becoming more and more uneasy about his charge.

At last my friend consulted me about sending him to school, and I think that I fixed his purpose by using that well-worn statement that school was the place to knock the nonsense out of a fellow. Oliver started at the word "knock." He thought, probably, that a knock might break Eugenius ; but at last, after anxious conversations with me, and more and more anxious consultations with Hannah Marsden, he determined to send the boy to school.

I was present by chance when the amazing child departed for school. He wore a broad white collar, which had no shoulders to rest upon ; and he showed not a trace of emotion. Noll was nervous and eager to get the parting over ; he stood patting the boy on the backbone. Hannah Marsden was very quiet, but very pale. I felt sure that she was fond of her strange charge ; but even at that moment she did not forget the conventional attitude of a nurse. She did not even put out a hand to Eugenius ; and it was clear that Eugenius never even thought of kissing her. As the cab rolled away, she turned whiter still, and Noll without a word fetched a glass of water and an old-fashioned bottle of smelling-salts. "A good

soul!" he said to me, as she walked quietly away—"a good devoted woman! May Heaven reward her!" I observed that his eyes were suffused with tears as he spoke.

III.

SCHOOL seemed to be not unsuccessful. The half-yearly reports praised the boy's propriety and regularity, but made no mention of abnormal talent. Eugenius, on his side, said simply that the teachers were stupid and did not teach him anything which was worth knowing. He made no complaints of bullying, about which his guardian had been very anxious: he seemed to realize with an effort that there were other boys in the school. He went back term after term without repining; and Noll tried to be content, and to persuade himself that his charge would end by being like other people. What pains are taken by careful elders that the young should be all of one pattern! I knew from the first that Eugenius would make vain all efforts to mould him to the common shape. Who could mould an ash-plant? How could he be like other boys—he who cared neither to eat nor to

play? He did enough school-work to escape censure, and he spent all his leisure-time and all his ample pocket-money on books, from which he learned the history of a piece of chalk and the reason of the presence of lead in pencils.

Though Oliver could not prevent the recurrence of anxious thoughts, he was fairly content with his boy until he was seventeen years old. Then he suspected a change in the strange youth, and his anxiety grew with his suspicion. One evening in the holidays I missed my friend from his usual place in the club dining-room, and early the next day I went to his house that I might learn the cause of his absence. I found him in some disorder. He told me that Eugenius, for whom on each afternoon of the holidays a comfortable tea was prepared, had asked him on the previous day to stay at home and share his unpretending meal. The good man had been delighted: his sanguine soul had seen the end of the boy's unnatural reserve: he had given up his dinner without a sigh. During the meal he had exerted himself to be agreeable, and at the end he had said with effusion that he had enjoyed a rare pleasure. "I am glad too," the boy had said, and Mr. Roundel had glowed—"I

am glad too, for it is not good for man to eat alone."

"Eh?" said Oliver.

"A cheerful companion," said the boy, "is good for the digestion. His talk should be quietly agreeable and requiring no mental effort in his auditor. I hope that you will join me often."

Noll had promised to join him often, but he had promised without enthusiasm. "What manner of boy is this," he asked me, rather sadly, "who regards me as a sort of pepsin?"

I could not give him much comfort. I suggested that the youth was becoming self-conscious and was turning his scientific scrutiny upon himself. "He is considering what is good for him," I said.

"I have tried to do my duty by him," said Noll, sadly.

Only a few days later, Noll, descending comfortably to breakfast, found the muffin-dish empty. He is very fond of muffins and not fond of practical jokes. Was it possible that Eugenius had been joking? A flash of hope visited the good gentleman: he looked eagerly at the youth, but he saw no glimmer of humour;

only he saw, or fancied that he saw, an unusual unctuousness. Eugenius wore an air almost sleek, as of a lean cat who had come unexpectedly on cream. In answer to his guardian's mute appeal he said that he had eaten the muffins.

"All?" said Oliver, not without pathos.

The boy nodded. "I owed it to myself," he said: "I had to redress the balance. Yesterday I went up-stairs for my book instead of sending Hannah. I felt that I had overexercised my altruism; and so I rose early this morning and ate the muffins."

When Noll told me of this incident, he was still disturbed by it. "I did not grudge him the muffins," he said: "I only hoped they'd plump him out a bit; but it didn't seem right to me." I explained that the youth had been taking a scientific view of morality and had been translating his conclusions into practice. I was struck by the admirably logical and practical mind of Eugenius; but Oliver was not satisfied. "It's uncommonly like old-fashioned selfishness," he said; and he added after a minute, "Selfishness is a nag that don't want exercising: he's always in condition."

I showed Noll that a society of which every member was always sacrificing himself or herself to some other member would be an absurdity. The good man heard me with admiration. He was good enough to say that I spoke with cleverness. But, when all was said, he shook his head once more and said that, for his part, he saw small chance of our world being brought to a stand-still by people passionately sacrificing themselves in a circle.

No long time passed before a new departure of the extraordinary youth brought greater trouble to my poor friend. Eugenius arrived at a decision on his own career, and stated crisply to Oliver that he would go no more to school. Oliver showed an uncommon warmth. He spoke with simple force and homely illustration as he advocated the old fashions and the old landmarks, the obedience of children, and the due authority of elders. Eugenius, after listening with admirable patience, said merely that he had made up his mind to go no more to school, because he knew that he could learn more at home.

"But how do I know that?" asked Noll, passing his handkerchief across his brow.

"You must remember that I am responsible—that I have made myself responsible for you."

"It was very foolish," said Eugenius.

"What!" cried Noll. "Oh, my boy!"

"Thoughtless philanthropy," said the boy, "is the parent of mischief. By adopting a baby you encourage improvident marriages, and the growth of population in a community already overcrowded."

"Where did he learn such things?" asked Noll of the ceiling. He received no answer, and presently, warmed by a novel indignation, he turned upon Eugenius and said, "It is hardly your place to blame me."

"Why not?" said the boy, impartially. "One should not let one's private interests blind one to what is wrong in conduct. The woman who easily places a baby in comfort is naturally tempted——"

"Boy," cried Noll, with horror, "are you speaking of your mother?"

"I am speaking of the abstract woman."

"And she was your mother!" cried Noll, inspired. "You are—you must be the abstract infant! Heavens! have I adopted an isosceles

triangle? Suppose that I had hung you on the knocker of the Foundling Hospital?"

"That institution," said Eugenius, "is open in a less degree to the charge which I have brought against yourself."

"Then I suppose that I ought to have left you to starve upon the pavement?"

"Very probably. However," added Eugenius, after a pause, "I am here, and now the important thing is that I should justify my presence, however irregular. I wish to know as much as it is possible for me to learn."

"My poor boy," said Noll, with a groan, "my poor boy!" And he went out and shut the door behind him.

IV.

OLIVER ROUNDEL told himself that he must be firm. Here was a great opportunity for the exhibition of firmness. "Hang it," said Noll, "but the boy shall go back to school!" He walked about, wagging his fist and nodding his head and pressing his lips together, as amiable stout gentlemen will who are making up their minds not to give way an inch. He told himself that now was the time for the putting down of his foot, and yet, when all the noddings and waggings and pressings were done, Eugenius did not go back to school. The fact is, that Hannah Marsden begged him off: Noll could not refuse the pleading of her pale face.

"Oh, sir!" said Hannah, who had been waiting for Mr. Roundel inside the front door, "you must not send Master Eugenius back to school."

"So he says," said Noll, with an uneasy laugh.

"Oh, sir, does he know?"

Noll looked at Hannah with surprise. She had grown older, as indeed is common; but she looked older than she was, and there was now a degree of anxiety in her face which surprised Noll.

"Does he know what?" he asked.

"How ill he is," said she.

"Ill! My goodness! Is it the head? No! Then what is it? My good woman, my dear good woman, you alarm me very much. What is it?"

"Oh, sir, he's drying up!"

"Good heavens!" cried Noll. "I never heard of such a thing. Drying up? This must be seen to."

On the very next morning Noll sent for Dr. Tom Slatterly, who was a rising man. Dr. Tom came, bright as a frosty morning, and punched the patient Eugenius all over. Then he pressed hands and slapped backs all round, and prophesied with an encouraging laugh that "we" should be all right in no time. Regular life, air, and exercise (not too much, but just enough), milk, stout, cod-liver oil, and occasionally as much potass as would stand on a sixpence of

the ordinary size and shape—such were the recommendations of the lively and sanguine Dr. Tom. “But above all,” he said, “the boy must think of nothing. He must make his mind a blank, an absolute blank. He must think of nothing.” He smiled widely, smote Noll again upon the ample shoulder, declared that “we” should be right in less than no time, slipped the fee into his pocket, and was gone. So Oliver decided that, inasmuch as schools had a tendency to excite thought in boys abnormally disposed to thinking, Eugenius must not go back to school. The milk, the stout, the cod-liver oil, the potass were provided, and the sixpence. Moreover, Noll spoke to the boy very seriously. “You must think of nothing,” he said.

“Is that the same as saying that I must not think of anything?”

“There, there,” said Noll, petulantly; “you are thinking now or you couldn’t ask such questions.”

The boy smiled faintly, and Noll looked at his head, and so looking was disquieted. Could any one with such a head think of nothing? “You must think of nothing,” he repeated with more decision: “doctor’s orders.”

The boy leaned his head upon his hand, and there was that in the movement which made further speech from Noll impossible. It was like a melon propped by a twig.

Not many days later his guardian found Eugenius busy with the pen. "You are thinking," he said: "you are at it again!"

"I must finish this," replied the boy. "It is a sketch of my antecedents."

"You don't know 'em, my poor boy," said Noll.

"I infer that the last link was a woman," said Eugenius; "but the interest begins so far back."

Noll looked over the boy's shoulder and read: "Once upon a time there was a vast smudge of matter which was inevitably lopsided, and hence motion arose." "Oh, my poor boy!" said he, and went out and shut the door.

Oliver Roundel went out and started for his club, but black Care went with him, and when he hailed a hansom, black Care leaped in too and sat beside him. There was the boy at home, thinking as hard as he could think; and here was he, Noll, bowling away to a comfortable

thoughtlessness and a good dinner. It must not be. He shoved his stout stick out of the cab, and began banging the front of the roof with such vigour that the driver pulled up in a hurry. "Do you want to knock the top off?" asked the driver.

"Albion Street," said Mr. Roundel, curtly.

When Noll reached home he found Eugenius still at work. The pen was moving steadily in very neat lines across the paper, and it could not be hoped that it did not move in sympathy with a steady progress of thoughts.

"My dear boy," said Noll, "do give yourself a little rest. Chaos can wait awhile. If you must think, you surely need not think all the time."

"I have so little time left," said the boy.

"What do you mean?" asked Noll, with a sudden sinking. His dinner-hour was past.

"I cannot live long," said Eugenius.

"Now that is monstrous nonsense," exclaimed Oliver Roundel. "The doctor says that you are quite well; that you need nothing but fattening food—milk, stout, cod-liver oil, and occasionally as much potass as will stand on a sixpence, and, above all, no thinking." He

marked the items on his fingers, and paused for emphasis on the "no thinking," with the forefinger of his right hand on the stalwart thumb of his left hand. He was very determined.

"He does not know," said the boy.

"Pooh, pooh!" cried Noll.

"He does not know," repeated the boy, calmly. "I have observed in myself an extraordinary excess of starch. It will stiffen me."

"It will what?" asked Noll, with amazement.

"Stiffen me," said the boy. "I am stiffening!"

"Oh, my poor boy!" said Noll, once more. He looked at the majestic head and at the shrunken body, and then his eyes fell on the hand again. If Eugenius were to lean his head on his hand once more, it was clear that the wrist would snap. "Oh, my poor boy!"

But a few days had passed when Eugenius refused to get up in the morning. He pronounced himself too stiff. Noll sent in haste for Dr. Tom Slatterly. The confident physician arrived like a morning breeze, punched the boy, slapped the guardian, prescribed iron, and above all things a rubber. And so a rubbing time

began for Eugenius, who lay patient, now on his back, and now on what should have been his stomach, while a kind and accomplished man rubbed his bones with a hand as broad as his victim. Eugenius said nothing, but like the fabled bird he thought the more, and not all the expostulations of his good guardian would stop the mental process. He thought and stiffened day by day.

V.

HANNAH MARSDEN nursed him day and night. She had been so sure that he was ill; and now a nice observer would have detected in the very heart of her sorrow a faint light of joy for that the lad was laid abed and, as it were, delivered bound into her hands. She was jealous—jealous of the kindly rubber, jealous of her good friend Oliver, jealous of the other servants because they asked news of the sick—jealous with the jealousy of good women. She grew whiter and thinner every day, and her eyes were fierce when they turned on anybody but her boy.

And then came a day when Dr. Tom did not punch the patient, and patted Noll's shoulder instead of slapping it, and said that it was very strange, and that it was his duty to tell them to prepare for the worst. Hannah was

standing calm and respectful at the foot of the bed ; but when the doctor had gone out and shut the door, she fell on her knees and cried out in pain. Still on her knees she dragged herself along the bedside till she could feed her eyes upon the boy's face. "Look at me," she cried, and Eugenius turned his quiet eyes upon her. "Look at me," she moaned ; "I am your mother."

Noll, who had been administering the fee outside, came in at the moment. He stood still in amazement. Hannah paid him no attention. She had wound her arms round her poor walking-stick of a child, who looked at her very gravely. "How very wrong of you !" said Eugenius.

"Don't talk, my darling : it will make you weak. Only say Mother. I am your mother : you understand that, don't you, my child, my dear ?" No one but a mother could have hugged him so tightly and so gently too. "Oh, sir," she said, not loosening her arms, but turning her head towards Oliver, "I will tell you all : I will explain all."

"Never mind me," said Noll.

"And my father ?" asked Eugenius.

"My husband!" she moaned, with her face pressed against the blanket.

"Did he know much?" asked the boy. "Was he scientific?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes," she cried, with an old rage long repressed.

"He might edit my papers," suggested Eugenius.

"Don't think of him: think of me. I have thought of you day and night all these years, and you have never kissed me." She burst into a passion of sobs.

"Don't," said Eugenius, moved by a vague distress. "It can't be right to lose one's self-control, nor to keep such a secret as this."

"Have you no heart?" she cried, lifting her wan face again, and staring with famine into his eyes.

"I don't know; I don't understand; I am sure this is not right. Oh, no, no: don't, poor thing!" There was even a faint colour in the boy's cheek, and his mother seemed content. With an effort she assumed again her usual manner, rose from her knees, and smoothed the pillow. "There, there!" she said, "you must rest now: you shall hear everything to-morrow:

you must rest now." She hesitated a moment, then stooped and kissed his fine forehead. The boy lay still and closed his eyes.

Noll followed her from the room. She made an effort to draw about her again the remnants of her respectful servanthood, but the woman was too strong for her, and it was the mere mother who looked so anxiously into Mr. Roundel's face.

"Is it true?" asked Noll, "or did you say it for his good, to excite his feelings?"

"His feelings?" she asked; "did he show feeling?"

"I never saw the boy so moved," he said, with decision. "He had a distinct colour in his cheek."

"He pitied me," she murmured, in a sort of ecstasy: "he pitied me a little. If he should love me before he come to die!"

"And you really are the mother?" said Noll.

"Yes," said she.

"The mother I have been hunting all these years?"

"I will tell you," she said. "I have done very wrong to you, and I will tell you."

"Not if it bores you," said Noll, kindly. She went on without heeding his words. It was a relief to her to tell it all at last. "I married a very clever man," she said. "I loved him with all my heart, and he cared for nothing but experiments. When my baby was born he wanted to take him away from me. He told me that he wished to make an experiment on the child."

"What?" shouted Oliver Roundel.

"An experiment. He dared not make it on any child but his own. No one need know if it failed. If it succeeded it might benefit millions of children yet unborn. I said that my child was born, my child was mine. I fought for him. I swore he should not take my boy."

"Quite right, by Heaven!" cried Noll.

"And then he told me that he had only married me for this—to have a child on whom he could try this cruel thing. I could not stay then. I took my child and ran away."

"Quite right," said Noll again.

"Then I was pushed into the middle of that awful crowd. I was made dizzy by the roar of the people and the glare of the fire; and I thought that I should faint and my child be

killed, and I gave him to a man to hold, and he passed him to another, and I saw him going from me and I could not cry. But I saw him again when the crowd melted, I saw him in your arms."

"I remember," said Noll, softly, looking at his arms.

"And I thought that you would be good to him. I dared not claim him. I dared not say that I was his mother, lest questions should be asked and I and he be sent back to his father. I followed you home. I ran till I fell down here in the darkness at your door. Then afterwards I dared to come and to be my child's nurse; and, oh! I have been frightened all these years, and now I am more fearful still, for I have been weak, and I have had to tell my secret."

"Your secret is safe with me," said Noll. "And you have kept it all this time—and you a woman! Poor thing," he said, "poor thing!"

"And you forgive me?" she asked.

"What for?" asked he—"there, there, poor thing, don't cry!"

Eugenius continued to regard his mother with a certain kindness. He looked at her and listened to her when she could not refrain from

loving looks and words, as a father will look and listen to the eager babe whose prattle he does not understand. When she fondled his thin hand he did not draw it away; and, indeed, he was not strong enough. He turned his eyes on Oliver with a perplexity in them which they had never shown before. He was puzzled by the restrained excitement of the woman, but he bore it well: he knew that it was for a very little time. And then most quickly came the day when the boy lay a-dying. Like Goethe he had asked for more light, and the well-washed dimity curtains had been pulled back as far as they could go. He lay quiet, looking at the blue sky. He was well content, and gazing away beyond the house-tops to the far spaces of the air he occupied himself with an ingenious theory of colours. At last his thoughts dropped from their lofty voyage, and, turning quiet eyes on Noll, he asked where he would bury him.

“Oh, good heaven!” cried Noll.

“I was thinking,” said Eugenius, “that, if I could be of any use in the garden——”

“Don’t!” shouted Noll, and hearing how loud his voice had rung he looked with terror at

the door, through which Hannah was sure to come back in a moment. She had heard him and she came.

"I haven't got a garden," said Noll, "and you must not say such things."

"Then burn me," said the boy, "if it can be done cheap."

"I'll spare no expense," said Noll.

"You pain me very much," said Eugenius: "it is so unreasonable a form of expenditure. Good-bye." He gave a great sob and expired. Hannah fell on her knees.

VI.

NOLL was strangely unsettled. The boy who had been washed to his arms on the tide of fire had been borne away by the great ebb of death, and there was no reason now why his former guardian should not slide easily back to his old unruffled life: his perambulations through the London streets, with accompaniment of Johnsonian meditation, his arm-chair and well-read book, his friends, of whom I was not the least, his quiet dinners at the club. But Noll felt that a quick return to his old life would be little short of an insult to the young creature who had but just gone from him. So he hung about the house, unsettled, uncomfortable, almost nervous. Hannah talked of going, and this was a great aggravation. He was accustomed to her presence in the house, a presence bringing order and quiet; and it seemed to him an irrational, fantastic, ultra-feminine feeling which tempted

her to devote the rest of her life to the nursing of casual sick children. For the present she was too busy to go away; for there were many things which had belonged to her own sick child, and these had to be examined, arranged, and, where it would not injure them, bedewed with quiet tears. Then one morning, when Noll was sitting idle and perplexed in his den, Hannah came down to him with her hands full of papers. In her review of her boy's goods she had arrived at these, and she brought them to Mr. Oliver Roundel.

The eyes of my friend beamed at the sight of the papers. Here was something which he could do for the poor boy who had gone away, besides mooning about and denying himself the comfort of his club. He set to work in a most business-like way at the papers, on which the thoughts of Eugenius were written out in a marvellously neat hand. Noll sat over them till the shades of evening made even that formal writing obscure, and then he lit a candle at his elbow, and the more he read the more he sighed over his reading. These fragments of Eugenius seemed hard and sharp as broken slates, and, if they did not cut Noll's fingers, they wounded his heart.

At last he came in his slow examination to the largest of the pieces. "Nebulous stuff," Noll read, with patient eyes,

—"drew close into suns, and around each sun were circling planets moving towards it. One of these suns was ours, and among its planets was an insignificant object, which we call the earth. This earth was a small, smooth, glowing ball; but, giving out more heat than it took in, its crust cooled faster than its inward mass, and so was crumpled into ridge and fissure as thick paper is crumpled round a ball. Meanwhile the vapour clinging round the earth was drawn closer into water on its surface, and lay in its deepest hollows. Ridge grew higher and furrow deeper: the waters of each part met in a river, and the rivers ran into the seas: there were bold cliffs in place of shelving shores. Then, as this crumpled covering of our earth lost its own heat, the heat of the sun cooked its varied rind with divers effects. Climates became more and more distinct, and in due order appeared the fine procession of the seasons. So unlike parts were clothed with unlike herbs. The plant drew gases to itself and packed them into root, and stem, and leaf, and flower: the kid devoured the plant and packed them closer: the wolf devoured the kid and packed them closer still. At last a tight packet binding packets of compressed elements, a moving bundle of unlike and definite movements, a not uninteresting combination, I, Eugenius, stood erect upon the world. But I shall not stand long. I do not eat enough. I barely balance with surrounding things: my excess of motion leaves me: I

stiffen: I shall soon be dead. Then without pause my dissipation will begin. Organs will slide into organs, functions be lost in insensible motions, the packets will all be unrolled, and I shall be diffused gases once more. I shall not be. A personal immortality is impossible."

This was the end of the paper, over which Noll bowed his head in bitter sorrow. "His dissipation!" said Noll. "Oh, earth and heaven! Oh, my poor boy, were you a human boy, and are you no more than gases?"

"I was wrong," said the boy, who had come in unnoticed.

"Hullo!" cried Noll, wheeling his chair round.

"Yes, I was wrong," said Eugenius, mildly. Noll laid his finger on the impossibility of a personal immortality. He had been hurt deeply, and he frowned a little as he pointed.

"I wrote as I thought," said Eugenius, gently. He was certainly less angular and definite.

"But your description seems convincing," said Noll, frowning the more.

"It is clever," said the other, reading over his shoulder: "pretty, and not badly put—hum, hum—ingenious: perhaps not wholly false—curiously incomplete."

"And it is all a d—dismal lie?" asked Noll.

"There are more things in heaven and earth," said Eugenius, "than are dreamed of in your philosophy."

"And you quote poetry!" cried Noll: "you!"

"I am compelled to learn it," said the other.

"My education was sadly neglected."

"Your education!" cried Noll.

"Lopsided," said Eugenius.

"But look here!" cried Noll, now thoroughly aroused, "what's the meaning of all this? What are you doing here? You know it's most irregular?"

"My case was peculiar," said the ghost, not without a faint flavour of self-satisfaction. "I am permitted to come back to thank you. I left without thanking you."

"Don't mention it," said Noll.

"I must," said Eugenius; "I am told to. It is part of my education."

Noll thought him rather priggish, but he was certainly more human.

"There is another," said Oliver Roundel, after a minute's silence, and with some solemnity, "who is more worthy of your thanks than I."

"My mother!" said Eugenius. "I am not allowed to go to her yet: I am not advanced enough in my course. I shall see her some day." His voice was almost tender, and his former guardian looked at him with amazement. "Meanwhile," he went on, with a more business-like air, "I want an introduction to some people to whom I shall be interesting as a ghost."

"What? Mahatmas and things?" asked Noll, puzzled. "Letters out of the ceiling and all that?"

"No, no," said Eugenius. "I want to meet people who approach these questions in a scientific attitude."

"Scientific?" said Noll, dubiously.

"The scientific methods are all right in their place," said Eugenius, hurriedly—"in their place, mind you. I want you to give me a letter to some people who investigate us in a sober and sensible spirit."

"I know some fellows like that," said Noll, after a pause. "I know Marsham and Mauleverer."

"Take me to see them to-morrow," said Eugenius.

"Very well," said Noll. "You'll stay the night, of course. Your room is just as you left it: the bed can be aired in no time."

"Thank you," said Eugenius, "thank you so much. I do not need a bed now. Besides, I must not be away at night."

"Then when can you come up again?" asked Noll.

Eugenius looked a little hurt.

"I will come round in the morning," he said, laying a slight emphasis on the word "round." "*Au revoir!*" he added, primly, "and thank you once more."

Noll got up to shake his guest by the hand and to conduct him, as was his hospitable custom, to the front door. But Eugenius seemed anxious to avoid giving trouble, and let himself out without further delay. He slipped out quite casually.

VII.

EUGENIUS kept his appointment. Oliver started as the door-bell rang, and then shook his shoulders and told himself not to be a fool. "So you have come," he said, rather feebly, as the youth entered the room.

"Yes—and can you come at once? I have not much time."

"A cab, or what?" asked Noll, who could not shake himself free from a certain perplexity. Some sort of flying-machine seemed appropriate, or a pneumatic tube.

"A hansom, if you don't mind," said the ghost.

A cab was called, and Noll insisted that Eugenius should get in first. He then inserted himself with unusual care, finding it hard to realize the strange situation. There was a match-box fixed to the side of the cab, and he could not help trying to see it through his friend's

body. Did the cabman feel any strangeness in his fare? What people he had driven to all sorts of places! And yet perhaps he had never driven a lighter weight than Eugenius. He grinned in a friendly, but not in an unusually knowing manner, when Noll overpaid him with cold fingers.

Noll's inquiring friends rose when he entered. He had written on the previous evening to beg them to be at home and to be prepared for a surprise. Mr. Marsham advanced with outstretched hand, while Mr. Mauleverer after a word of welcome sank back into his low chair and stretched his long legs before him.

"Will you introduce me?" asked Mr. Marsham, with grave politeness, and he looked from Noll to where Eugenius stood, self-possessed, certain of his effect, cool as winter sunshine. Then Noll found his voice and said, "It's my ward, Eugenius: he's a ghost."

"A ghost!" cried out Mr. Marsham. "Mauleverer, be calm!"

Mr. Mauleverer uncrossed his legs and stared at Eugenius.

"Mauleverer," cried out Mr. Marsham again, "I implore you to be calm!" His voice, as he addressed his colleague, was broken and his

hands were shaking. "This is the crisis—the reward of all our labours. For heaven's sake be perfectly calm."

"All right," said Mr. Mauleverer, nodding.

"We must proceed methodically," said Mr. Marsham. "Mauleverer, we must be methodical and perfectly calm!"

Mauleverer nodded again and Mr. Marsham turned trembling to Noll. "What evidence have you?" he asked.

"Oh, he's all right," said Noll: "I've had him from infancy: I know him as I know myself."

"And he—pardon me, but I must ask it—and he died?"

"Yes," said Noll.

"And was buried?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

Noll answered with a half-apologetic glance at his late charge.

"And this is a ghost?" said Mr. Marsham.

"Ask it something," said Mr. Mauleverer to his friend, "and see if it will answer."

"*Him*, if you please," said Eugenius; "*him* and *he*—not *it*."

Mr. Marsham leaped at the sound of this

voice; but he made haste to restrain himself, and his fine courtesy helped him. "I am sure," he said, "that the—the—may I say phenomenon?"

Eugenius smiled coldly.

"I will not say ghost," said Mr. Marsham, hastily; "for even if the word were wholly satisfactory, which it is not, I might lay myself open to the charge of a *petitio principii*. You agree with me, Mauleverer?"

"See if you can see through him," said Mr. Mauleverer.

"Precisely!" said Mr. Marsham, and in a moment he had slipped round to the other side of Eugenius. "Mauleverer," he asked, with a voice trembling with anxiety, "do you see me?"

"Yes," said Mauleverer.

"And I see you," cried Marsham, "distinctly."

"But," said Mauleverer, "the chap (I beg his pardon) is so uncommon thin that I can't be sure I don't see round him on both sides."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Marsham, doubtfully, to Eugenius—"perhaps if you were to turn in profile——"

Eugenius turned with a smile, and Mr. Mauleverer rising from his chair came close, so close to him that he could no longer doubt that he saw his friend through the medium of their new acquaintance.

"Might we—would it inconvenience you," asked Mr. Marsham, with a thrill in his voice, "if we shook hands through you?"

"Not in the least," answered Eugenius, pleasantly. Mauleverer put out his hand without more ado, and the two able and honest inquirers shook each other by the hand for the first time through a ghost. It is not to be supposed, however, that they were content with such simple tests as these. Each wrote a minute account of the apparition (Eugenius accepted the word without protest) as he saw it; and the two accounts when compared left no doubt that Eugenius was objective. Mr. Marsham apologized for the term, but Eugenius seemed to object to no name but "it." Then Oliver Roundel was examined and re-examined about his former acquaintance with the boy, and notes were taken of his age, residence, death, burial, and other experiences. Mr. Marsham promised himself most interesting interviews with Mrs.

Marsden, Dr. Tom, and others. A volume was taking shape in his head as he talked and listened with his little note-book in his hand. At last Eugenius said, with a faint smile, "I hope that you are practically convinced. I obtained leave to make this one visit as a recognition of your patient, honest, and scientific inquiries. Scientific methods in their proper place—in their proper place, mark you!—deserve no less encouragement. Look at me well, for I must not return. Remember me well, for you will see me no more. I cannot come back to you if I would, for I am not my own master."

"Who is your master?" asked Mr. Mauleverer, in a loud clear voice.

"Ah! forgive me," said Eugenius; "I cannot tell you of these matters. It is I, and not any reports of mine, which I hoped that you would find interesting."

"And I assure you that we do," cried Mr. Marsham. "I speak for Mauleverer and myself when I say that you are the most interesting phenomenon (you forgive the expression?) which we have ever examined. We shall never forget this day; and if we cannot declare without time for consideration that the proof of

you is conclusive, we do not hesitate to say that you are probable in the highest—the very highest degree.” Eugenius bowed.

“Marsham,” said Mauleverer, “let us take him round to Montacute.”

“Would you come?” cried Mr. Marsham to Eugenius. “May I explain? We are carrying on from month to month a controversy with Professor Montacute, the eminent man of science, on the possibility of ghosts. He lives not half-a-mile from this. If you would come, and if he should see you as we see you, he may be convinced, and with him the greater part of the scientific world.”

“I’ll risk it,” said Eugenius, with unusual warmth. “I haven’t much time, but if you could call a cab——”

“We should just fill a four-wheeler,” mildly suggested Noll, who felt that he was being left out of the affair. Mr. Marsham had already dashed from the room, and headlong down the staircase.

“Your notions of ghosts are rather incomplete,” said Eugenius to Oliver. “If you three can get into a hansom you need not consider me. I can slip in anywhere.”

"I'm all for a growler," said Mr. Mauleverer ;
"and you can have a seat to yourself."

So down they went, and found Mr. Marsham quivering on the pavement and exhorting the cabman to excessive care. He breathed a great sigh of relief when he saw Eugenius again. "I told the driver," he said—"I am sure you will forgive me—that he must drive carefully because you are delicate."

"He might be gone in a moment," said Mr. Mauleverer, getting into the cab.

VIII.

PROFESSOR MONTACUTE sat alone in the dim light of his study—alone, save for the companionship of a bust of Aristotle and a brain in a bottle. His walls were lined with books, and his table covered with note-books and scraps of paper. With his noble brow and his long dressing-gown, he might have gone on the stage as Dr. Faustus. He had been thinking for but fifty years, but he looked older. Now he was thinking that he was somewhat tired of thinking, and he wished that his brain would rest like the one in the bottle. He looked up as he heard a knock at his door, and informed the parlour-maid with a slow nod that she might admit Mr. Marsham and Mr. Mauleverer.

He sat like Dr. Faustus, old and weary of recurring thoughts. He sat like Dr. Faustus, far away from the long days of boyhood, the warm blood, the dreams of adventure, the marvellous

discoveries, the glad fresh songs, the soft looks of women. He sat like Dr. Faustus, careless if Mr. Marsham and Mr. Mauleverer came or did not come; careless if the old earth took a wrong turn and spun into another system, or were run against by the butt-end of an inconsiderable comet. He sat like Dr. Faustus; and no Dr. Faustus was ever half so surprised by sudden entry of his Mephistopheles as was Professor Montacute when his door opened and his visitors came in.

The Professor rose to greet them. Then he stood staring; then he clutched the dressing-gown above his heart; and then, with a strange quivering cry for mercy, he fell back into his chair and fainted. In a moment Mr. Marsham was supporting him in his arms, rubbing his ivory hands, calling him back to life; while Mr. Mauleverer looked from the prostrate Montacute to the placid Eugenius. "I couldn't think who you reminded me of," said Mr. Mauleverer to Eugenius. The thin face of the Professor was blue where he had shaved for more than thirty years, and delicately fretted with fine lines about the eyes; but, for the rest, it was the face of the boy, and at the moment the

more ghostly of the two. Two monstrous peas could not be more alike than were the heads of Professor Montacute and of the boy Eugenius. Prostrate in his high-backed chair, the figure of the Professor suggested a walking-stick swathed about with flannel. A walking-stick in an overcoat would have suggested the body—if body it may be called—of the boy Eugenius.

Presently the eyes of the Professor opened and gazed at the boy. "God in His heaven have mercy," he said, slowly: "it is my son."

"It was your son," said Mr. Mauleverer. "It's a ghost now."

"A ghost!" said the Professor. "And have you come to haunt me, or to speak my doom?"

"I was brought," said Eugenius, who preserved a wonderful composure, "by these gentlemen, who hoped to convince you as a man of science that I was a fact and not impossible. Neither they nor I were aware of any relationship between us. Our visit was purely professional, and not domestic. On which basis would you wish it to continue?"

"And your mother?" asked Professor Montacute—"your mother? Is she yet alive?"

"She is," said Eugenius, dryly.

"I swear by Heaven!" cried the Professor, struggling to his feet, and with growing excitement—"I swear by Heaven that I sought her diligently—and you—yes, you."

"For purposes of experiment?" asked Eugenius, more dryly.

The Professor fell back into his chair with a groan. "For years, and years, and years," he said, "I have read and studied till my eyes closed of themselves, lest I should have a moment to think of her and of you. Terror has been at my elbow by day and in my dreams by night, and the anguish of shame and fear. I promised myself in my boyhood that I, first of all men, would rise above the weaknesses of humanity—that no human feeling should hinder for a moment my search of truth. And I thought that I had gained my end, and blighted with a frost all the common emotions which I despised. I married that I might be your father. I wished for your birth that I might experiment upon you at leisure."

"You were a damned scoundrel!" said Mr. Mauleverer.

"And where was my success?" cried out the Professor, with a new sharpness in his voice.

"When your mother left me, I found that I loved her—loved her as an ignorant boy loves the girl whom he has chosen for his wife; and I knew that I had been loved by her, and had killed her love, and that she hated me."

"My mother will pardon you," said Eugenius. "I know now why I was permitted to come back—it was to tell you that my mother will pardon you."

"Take me to her," said the Professor, feebly. "Let me crawl to her feet."

"The cab's at the door still," said Mr. Mau-leverer.

"And you," said the Professor again, falling at the feet of his son, "can you forgive me?"

"You must not kneel to me," said Eugenius, with a surprising tenderness. "I have been wrong too. I am being taught. I, too, have had to learn that the common feelings, like the common flowers, are the best. Noll!"

Never before had he called his guardian by that kindly diminutive, and Oliver Roundel started at the sound. The good man made an effort to speak, but he could not. Only he held out his hands to the Professor and helped him to his feet. The Professor trembled so

much that it seemed as if he would fall again ; and Noll supported him in his arms.

"You will take him to my mother?" said Eugenius, looking very softly at Noll, who nodded vehemently in answer. "My time is up," the boy went on. "God be with you all."

He went out, and no one stirred in the room till they heard the front door bang. Mr. Marsham was the first to speak.

"I hope that even at this moment," he said, "I may be allowed a single question. I cannot forget the scientific interest of this moment. Professor Montacute does not deny the ghost?"

"He doesn't deny anything," said Mr. Maulverer, largely. And the Professor bent his head with a peculiar new humility.

"Come," said Noll, kindly ; and he led him, after more than twenty years of lonely thinking, to his wife's feet.

AFTER TWENTY YEARS.



AFTER TWENTY YEARS.¹

I.

THE inner quadrangle of our old College is by no means quadrangular. It is irregular as a gerrymandered constituency, and is surrounded by irregular buildings. On one side is an end of the small chapel, on another the length of the more imposing dining-hall; and here and there is a short piece of old gray wall, high and grim, not to be climbed, it is believed, by the nimblest of undergraduates—and yet there were legends in my day. But for the most part the old “quad” was bounded by long blocks of buildings, full of windows behind and before, of which those pleased me most which looked inward upon our green turf and ancient trees. Our College was not famous for its architecture; and the block in which I lived was like a row of rather dingy houses, of which the front doors had been torn out. Blank doorways looked out, through which at lecture-

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times issued youth in cap and gown, or rushed figures in flannel at more exhilarating moments. No claim our ancient College made to architectural supremacy, nor to peculiar beauty among the gardens of the place; but yet on summer days its inner quad was a very pleasant place, and very private too, since it was rarely visited by pilgrims of the picturesque, though indeed it had its beauty, its modest share of the essential beauty of the place—the union of luxuriant green with old gray stone.

Private, too, the old quadrangle remained in winter, but not so beautiful. Often on a winter evening it was packed with a dense gray mist, a clammy melancholy, in which the naked trees stood damp and dim as ghosts, and the many windows were discerned as blurred yellow lights. It was on such an evening that a small party of the older men, as we called ourselves in all sincerity, were gathered for the last of our weekly gatherings in my rooms. One of the doorless doorways gaped in a corner from a stone passage somewhat wider than the others, and from this passage a flight of old oaken steps, shallow and broad, on which the dust was never stirred save by the hurrying

feet of boyhood, led up to the first floor. There my heavy "oak" was sported; and within our Society were gathered for our last meeting. The lamp, not too carefully cleaned, dimly lighted the room, and in the redder fire-light our chief poet lay, like Hamlet, on the rug. The whole is vivid to me now—the two old arm-chairs covered with a greenish, dimly figured stuff, and moulded to strange shapes by restless boyhood; a window-seat with the same stuff and the same half-humanized air; a deep, low sofa which showed another pattern and wanted a caster: these were the seats of the Society. On the round table stood a dull pewter coffee-pot, and on the same japanned tray two round pewter covers, under which was a plentiful store of buttered toast flavoured with anchovy; for even in the midst of our high discussions the quick-recurring appetite of youth turned lightly to such things and found some comfort in them.

We met once a week. Great freedom was allowed. We sat or lay as each one chose. If anybody had written anything, he read it. If nobody had written anything (and this was the common case), somebody threw down an

apple of discord and provoked discussion. If nobody would produce even a paradox, then we sat thinking, most of us smoking. There had been evenings when scarcely a word was said : of these we felt rather proud. As I look back, it seems to me that two currents of thought were prevalent at our meetings, possessing us in turn—the one, that the destiny of the country, of the race, of humanity, depended mainly on us ; the other, that it was absurd to feel our importance, that we were merely a little group of passing undergraduates, like many others, that we could do nothing, that our thoughts, our hopes, our all, was vanity. Still in our lowest depth there was some comfort in the fairly fixed belief that, if we could effect little in a world which did not satisfy us, none other of our contemporaries was likely to do so much. Of the older men, of the great names of the day which were frequent in the papers, we spoke regretfully : their successes seemed so poor, so much a matter of paragraphs or ribbons, so poor in comparison with what might be. Even among our contemporaries there were men, as we were aware, who would have resented the claim that we were the picked intel-

ligences. However, there was this excuse for our arrogance (and our arrogance was inoffensive, since our Society was almost a secret society, and we loved to think of it as such), that our College was eminently successful, at the time, by the test of classes and other honours, of which I need not say that we thought little; and that in our small body there were, among others, the most successful of the senior men of the College. Of course it was commonplace to pride ourselves on this or that University Scholar, since every year there was bound to be such another, and some men talked of good and bad years as if scholars were apples; and if our scholars were no more than other scholars, then was our Society a vain thing—and when this stream prevailed, it was thus we felt and thought: we are but a few weak youth of the year; others have gone, with their honours and their dreams; others will come (we can almost pick them out among the freshmen) and think themselves important; and all the while on goes the world, highly unsatisfactory, obtuse and obstinate, clanking and grunting, resolute not to be moulded to any reasonable pattern. On such a winter evening in Oxford as that on

which we met for the last time, this stream of feeling and of thought was only too likely to prevail. Moreover, this meeting was our last. There was a certain solemnity in this thought, though not one of us would have been so guilty of the commonplace as to recognise it. But if it was right that something out of the common should happen, it did. It was Collier's speech. He was the most silent of us all. He had a most impressive silence, which during the whole time of our existence had been broken only three or four times, and then by nothing more than a gruff, half-articulate comment, which a less subtle audience would have hardly discriminated from a grunt. But on this, our last meeting, Collier spoke. He got up and shook himself, then turned to the mantel-piece and kicked the fender, and then, turning half towards us and for the most part looking down at his great feet, he spoke. I can see him now standing in profile thus, his heavy head bent, his great shoulders somewhat rounded, the trouser of the left leg showing a huge bagginess at the knee, the big square-toed boot of the right foot resting heavily on the fender. It was hard to say if he meant to kick the fen-

der as a preface to his speech, or that big boot had merely blundered among the fire-irons. I can shut my eyes and see him as he was then ; as for his speech, I can give it to you very nearly as he spoke it twenty years ago :—

“I have often thought that I ought to say something. Indeed, some of you have told me that I did not do my share. You see, I have never been a speaker. Till I came to Oxford I had nobody to speak to. But that is not what I want to say. If you will give me a few minutes——”

So he broke off, and our poet on the rug, who had been almost at his feet, got up and came and sat on the sofa, that he might see him better. There was another rattle in the fender, and Collier began again :

“First I want to say this: I have come here regularly once a week ; and I have liked to come. I want to thank you for giving me the chance. It has been more to me than anything in Oxford ; it has been a great pleasure to me to be with you—and I have had few pleasures. Most of you have come from a different sort of surroundings, public schools and so forth. If you knew what my boyhood was like, you

would understand what being asked to join you was to me."

That touched us nearly. Our boyhood looked back upon, its little troubles forgotten, was to most of us the age of gold. At times some of us felt extremely old, and then our boyhood was tenderly regarded as if school-life had been life indeed, and had ended. In contrast with this Arcadia sentimentalized by memory, there arose before my mind (and I felt that some contrast of the sort was vivid to us all) a clumsy, silent boy, in a dark, murky street, amid stunted people, thinking long thoughts. I had seen from the train once a town sitting squalid in an oasis of gray powder, that killed all grass; and I pictured him there. All that we really knew of him was that he came from some grammar-school in a north-country town, had been sent to the College by some fellow-townsmen as an unusual boy and likely to do honour to his birthplace, and that he had got our scholarship at his first attempt.

"That is the first point," he said: "I want to thank you. I did not know if I should like it or you; I nearly refused; I am glad I didn't. I thank you." There was a sort of deprecating

murmur ; I am sure that it struck us all as pathetic that he should be grateful for so little.

"I have thought," he went on, "if I could do anything for you in return. I have sat mum here week after week, and been of no use to any one. The only thing which I can do for you is this—to say simply, before we part, how it strikes me—what it all amounts to, I mean—this philosophical discussion of ours, or rather of yours—our study of philosophy here in Oxford—our whole work here, for it comes to that. Perhaps I ought to say that my view of this is not worth much. I don't know how to put it prettily. I don't know what it is worth. If it is worth nothing, I am a fool. If I did not think it worth something, I would not offer it to you. Anyway, it's my best. Well, I have sat here wondering at the cleverness of you all—yes, yes, I mean it! To a slow man, slow in thought and even slower in tongue, it is wonderful. But what does it amount to? What will you do with it? You can't go on staring in a Macbeth's cave with ghosts for kings."

It was hereabout that he seemed to grow in warmth, in force. He had been hesitating, hanging his head, glancing sideways now and

then with a sort of apology in his look. But he warmed slowly, and his sentences began to come slowly but regularly, like the blows of a hammer. They seemed to fall upon our hearts. He turned towards us; he had taken his foot from the fender and stood facing us, firmly planted on his two legs, which were slightly bowed, his large forehead pushed forward, and his eyes regarding us from their deep sockets. Before he had finished his speech, he had even developed a gesture, a short, jerky movement of the right arm, like the germ of an orator's gesticulation.

"This philosophy!" he said; "I am out of patience with it. But that is foolish. I owe it much. It is fine work for the head. When one has understood Kant, or the main positions of Kant, one may be sure, I take it, that one will find nothing in life too hard to understand, if one gives one's mind to it. The history of philosophy ancient and modern, each system of each philosopher, and especially the critical position of Kant and the Oxford Hegelianism which we know—these have done for our minds that which rowing or cricket or foot-ball has done for your bodies. See how you bear your-

selves, and how I do not for lack of these exercises! And so it is with the wholesome working of our minds. This philosophy of ours makes strong and alert the power by which we succeed in life. The use of the metaphysics, which have brought us together here week after week, seems to me that and that only—not to store in us one grain of useful knowledge, but to train our minds for their real work in the world. They have been food for examinations, our philosophical phrases and formulæ. They have done their turn. Leave them here in Oxford. Get ye up to the great cities, where there is life. Life is the thing with which we have to deal now—the world of struggle—not the nature of the Universe, not the nature of the soul of man. The world which awaits us is not the world of the metaphysician, half made by me, only possible if the eternal I exist. No, nor the world which the theologian borrows from an older, feebler philosophy, the flux of sensations, the fleeting show. These worlds and all such I leave behind me here with my soul—or at least with all waste of time in considering my soul. The world to which I go asks all my thought, all my energy. It is real

enough for me. I can kick it like Dr. Johnson. I will hold it under foot and use it as I choose. Our work here has been the dumb-bell for our muscles, the whetstone for our weapons—for the knives, if you like, with which we must open each one his oyster. We are trained; we have a good start. The more fools we if we let one of the men here get ahead of us. And among ourselves a rivalry, a struggle to be first. Shall it be you, or you, or you, or I? I, if I can. Wake out of sleep and the dreams of sleep. Put away childish things. Work seven days a week. Then let us meet twenty years hence—that's the only dream that tempts me still—and see where each of us stands, how far each has gone."

He paused as if he waited for agreement; but we waited for each other; nobody spoke.

"There is enough to do for twenty lives," he went on more slowly. "A dozen careers are worth our work—to be a great lawyer, a great politician, a great rich man. Money—money one must get, for to-day that is power—not birth any more, but money. Mathematics are gymnastics too; they get you 'firsts' and work your mind; but now compound addition and multi-

plication will suffice—to add, to double, to make money breed like Shylock in the play, to grow strong.

“I know what you are thinking. It has been in the air of this room week after week. If you give up these thoughts which have so occupied us here, these thoughts of the Universe, the soul, and God, which we have so cherished here, if you give yourself up wholly to this world and to getting on therein, can you keep straight?—or perhaps you don’t care if you do keep straight or no. That is what you will say to me. I answer that I do care. I mean to keep straight. Not one of us will succeed in life if he don’t keep straight. We can drop the question why. That was moral philosophy, that, too, a whetstone for our wits. We have been writing in our examinations that the eternal contrast of right and wrong, the eternal sense of duty, whatever the strange forms it may take here and there, compel faith in God and in the effort to do right as the effort to do His will. I don’t say No. I don’t say Yes. I say, enough. Throw in these speculations, too, with those on the true basis of the universality of Nature’s laws. Leave them all behind you here

for the training of the next lot of men. I do not need them. I see right and wrong as facts in the world, as the chief fact of life—two-thirds of life, if you will have it so. Our affair is to stick to the right as each sees it, and in fighting each for himself to be fair to the other fighters. Your public schools have taught you that and this place, too, with all its games and races. You don't trip up the other runner. As to vices, they cost health and money, and hinder work: that's enough.

"But you may say, some of you, that you need more help, stronger checks, fearing your own youth and hot blood. I can't see it. What are these temptations of which our elders warn us? People don't ask me to wines; but I have tasted wine and I don't like it. Tea is my temptation, I suppose, or the College toast and water—or gambling? Wise speculation will increase one's money, one's power, if that be gambling. As for betting on cards or horses or raindrops on a window-pane, that is fool's work. Women too! I have read in books that they wreck the lives of men in some way. Chain yourselves to the oars as you pass the island of the Sirens. Are we swine of Circe?

Or maundering gapers after the Lorelei? The poets cook up these things, and average sensual youth sniff their fragrance with delight. A man worth anything is not wrecked by a woman. I know that, though I know nothing else about women. *Vidi tantum*; or rather *via vidi*. I don't remember my mother. I have hardly looked at a woman. A rustle of petticoats, that is what she is to me, or a squeaky voice speaking to another man. A fig for these temptations, as they call them! It is simple to be strong and trust oneself. I don't purpose to seek strength elsewhere, like a gaping monk—not by prayer, nor by going to church and seeming to believe. Six days of struggle, each for himself, and on the seventh an hour or two of admiring a religion of self-sacrifice. Why that? That—that is all, I think."

So he ended, and shifted himself uneasily when he had done his task, hanging, as it were, to the mantel-piece, uncertain, I think, whether to go away or to sit down again. A dull silence followed, full of discomfort. Boys, and imaginative boys as some of us were, we were depressed by the sodden atmosphere. We were not shocked. We were proud of never being

shocked. We had discussed all questions at our meetings: that was the very reason of our existence as a Society. But we were sensitive to the manner of presenting a view, very sensitive to manner. A boast of atheism made one evening by our Hamlet of the hearth-rug, after drinking, had thrilled us with lively emotions. We had jumped on him, so to speak, with respondent passion; we had been eloquent, abusive, and happy. At our next meeting the young poet had read to us a long recantation, very fine in our ears, but somewhat mystical. Incidents like that were stimulating, delightful. But this speech of Collier was another matter; it had buffeted us. Dully hammered out, it hurt our ears, or like cold drops of water chilled our skin. To hear one of ourselves, one no older than ourselves, avow quietly and with such conviction his determination to fight only for himself! Fight indeed! Had it been a question of fighting, there had been genial warmth enough. We might have been frightened, but we should have been hot, excited. But here was no thought of keen combat, no purpose of wild days of ringing battle. We sat there, as he spoke, looking into a future, day after day

of dull work in dull rooms, work with figures perhaps, which most of us loathed, or in the intricate mazes of the laws of England—dour days with dim light, with no faith, no hope, no love, and, when the hair was gray, power perhaps—or money. Who wanted money? We sat in a gray fog of silence, like the air without, some smoking, all deeply revolting. His very presence afflicted us, his awkward strength untempered by those sports and games which had been no small part of our lives, his face which would have looked fleshy had not his head been so strong, his jaw so squarely formed for decision. He seemed a massive youth, a son of earth only, fit to make his way with a Thor's hammer, and under his heavy brows eyes which did not rise easily to the stars. He would trample under foot the wonder and the beauty of the world like jungle-grass—spirituality, religion, love. We waited, each for the other to speak. It was intensely uncomfortable. It made some of us, me for example, feel weak. He had spoken of twenty years, and they lay before me like a dusty road in a dry land—and at the end what? I felt in all my frame, in all my nerves, that it was he who after his twenty

years would have surpassed us all. I saw him heavier, stronger, Attorney-General perhaps, or a man of millions, and myself lean and feeble, a poor thing in his presence; and I felt as if each one of the rest of us was feeling the same. Not that I envied his success: it seemed far more dreary than a picturesque failure. He would win, and the winning was as bad as the losing. Ineffable dreariness lay on my tongue. Yet they were my rooms and I felt that I must say something, if no one else would speak. "Won't anybody have some more coffee or anything?" I said.

II.

IN the autumn of a recent year I got a note from a boy of my acquaintance, a brilliant, pleasant youth who had just taken his degree at Oxford. He had been suffering from an attack of that strange sadness, world-smart of the hobbledehoy, the weariness of a world of which he knows so little, the malady which hits many a clever, fanciful youth between man and boy. He had been good enough to confide his troubles to me, and had professed and doubtless felt much gratitude, less for the advice, of which, to tell the truth, I could detect but slight effect, than for the patience and the interest, of which I have always an inexhaustible supply for the problems of youth, and which pleased his self-love. My young friend had not done so well in the schools as was expected. He was pleased to look on life rather darkly for a time, and to see in the world nothing which exactly suited him. To withdraw himself into solitude and to think had seemed the only good thing for the moment. Having received from him one

week a letter (it might have borne the postmark of Elsinore) in which doubts of everything in heaven and earth appeared, I was not surprised to find the epistle of the next week dated from an ancient house which had once been an abbey, and which had been taken some years ago by an Anglican brotherhood and vivified again to a new form of its ancient use. I had no thought that my correspondent was to be a monk of any kind. I had heard of the brotherhood, and knew that the dwellers in the abbey sought to make no converts, except, perhaps, by their example. They went there to learn, being bound to close study for some years (I forget how many) before they went forth to teach or preach to their fellows. Only twice a year, in Lent and in autumn, they admitted a small number of men who sought seclusion for a month or two, rest and leisure for thought. So I guessed what my young friend was doing there, and in answer to his letter, which pressed me to come, I was glad to go down to see him and the place.

It was late autumn, and an autumnal stillness held the air. The leaves hung late, and not one of them seemed to stir. I had walked across

country to the place, and, as I walked alone, there had deepened for me a half-melancholy pleasure in the time, a sense of fulness as though one felt the brimming of the springs. The white mist had clung along the river when I started, but at noon no film remained, and the sun hung red and tranquil in a cloudless sky. Still in shady corners the grass was drenched with dew, and, as I crossed the water-meadows towards the gables of the old abbey and the blue, calm smoke rising above the trees and melting slowly, again and again from the rank grass a hare leaped almost at my feet and fled, leaving her shape where she had lain. The rising smoke looked thin, and brought to me a prevision of the frugal board and cold, pure rooms which probably awaited me. It seemed a fair haven where those who loved a monastic life might play their parts with no jarring sense of incongruity. Even the railroad was but an infrequent trail of smoke beyond the river, on the furthest edge of the valley. It seemed that they played their parts very thoroughly, and that even their visitors, who came but for a month or so, were expected to wear a sort of monkish garb, of which costume I ought to have

been warned, for indeed it was with a painful impulse to laugh jarringly in that beautiful silence that I saw in the gate-way my young friend awaiting me, his boyish head and slender throat raised, as if surprised to be there, above the coarse brown frock of a friar. Luckily I preserved a decent gravity, and he was quite earnest enough for two. He drew me away into the garden, where a few brothers were digging, like monks in a picture, the cords about their waists drawn tighter for their work, and so on into a quiet alley where he could tell me all. Little talk was a custom of the place, and he had large arrears. I listened with sympathy and liking, not too much depressed by his sorrows. The day was filled to the brim with a sweet kindred melancholy: if he was sad as night, it was a night poetical with stars. "O good old times," I thought, "when I was so miserable !" and I confess that my thoughts ran lightly backward to my own youth, its follies and its friends, its doubts and dreams, busy with them, at least as much as with this boy's confessions. While this young gentleman was sad as night for very wantonness, I had at moments an incongruous vision of him, dancing in the coming

London season, with nimble shoes and a most unmonastic shirt-front—a vision which was realized, I may say, on one of my rare visits to the ball-rooms of the metropolis. Yet is he not given over to frivolity; he is now a candidate for Parliament, and is nursing the country labourer, I know not how.

After much which was of greater interest to him, my friend told me that he had a special permission to bring me in to dinner. They dined at two, and I was glad of it. The tenuity of the smoke above the ancient roofs was a true sign of the fare; but I had enough, and, moreover, I was very deeply happy at the long, well-scrubbed table in the long, panelled room. Down each side of the board sat silent the good brothers; and I amused myself by distinguishing those who were at home there from the brief visitors who were seeking a modern rest-cure in an ancient form. I could see nothing in the dress to distinguish them. It was very strange to me, and not a little touching. I felt as if the old dwellers in the abbey, so like and so unlike, must revisit there, ghosts coming back to ghosts, in the glimpses of a winter moon. All together the diners made a picture

in harmony with the day; but again and again, when I had looked upon them thus, my eyes singled out one man; and when my youth and I had left the board and gone out together to the porch, where he said sadly that he could not bring himself to smoke a cigarette in that dress, I asked him who he was who had thus drawn my eyes. He answered shortly; (I think that he was noticing that the ruddy sun declined, and considering if he had told me all, quite all, about himself); he told me that this was a chap who worked in the East-End, and who had overdone it and come here for rest—not a parson, he thought—no parson would be so silent. He could not remember his name. It was clear that he had not interested himself deeply in his fellow-patients. Even as he gave me this scanty information, I felt a touch upon my shoulder, and, turning, met the eyes of the man of whom I had been asking. Memory leaped at the touch, and his name came to my lips; “Collier!” I said. He nodded. Then, “I thought for a moment that you had come to me,” he said: “it is just twenty years since I have seen you.” Twenty years! My memory was in its most sensitive state. The words

swept me back, as it were, into the room where I had seen him last. Vividly the scene came back to me—my college rooms on that chill winter night, his speech, his very tricks of manner as he stood by my mantel-piece. In twenty years we were to meet again and compare our successes. The years had gone, and I looked on a face worn with work and pain, in which the eyes looked much larger than I remembered them.

“My dear boy,” I said to my younger friend, “will you give me up for the short remnant of the day? Any day I will come to you again, or, when you have done with this place, come to me. I have not seen Collier for twenty years.” The truth is that I panted to hear; I was possessed by a devouring curiosity. Grace is one of the boy’s finest qualities; he not only yielded me to my older friend, but apologized for having monopolized me. Five minutes later I was in Collier’s bed-room, or “cell” I suppose that I should call it. I sat down without ceremony on the narrow bed, for there was no chair in the room; nor was there a carpet on the boarded floor. My curiosity had to wait a while, for he began to ask me about the others,

those who had been of our little Society of clever lads. I told him all that I knew; it did not sound impressive. It struck me as funny that they were still promising young men—most of them at the bar, one an under-secretary for something, another an archdeacon. Our poet was in the City and was said to be growing rich by brilliant speculations, which fired his imagination. One, who had been, I think, the most popular of our little Society, had vanished utterly, as a man sinks exhausted from a floating spar in mid-Atlantic, no man knew when nor where. “And you?” I said, as soon as I could—“and you? You were the strongest of us all.” He had been staring from the window; but he moved now and went to the fire-place, black and empty. He put a foot upon the fender and leaned an arm heavily upon the mantel-piece. The position moved me almost to tears, so clearly did it bring back to me the scene of twenty years ago, so sharply did it mark the change in him, who had seemed so lusty strong to move the world. Then excess of strength had seemed to make him clumsy as he leaned against the fire-place; now he seemed to seek support for his weakness. At first his

voice sounded weak and harsh from disuse. "I should like to tell you," he said, moving his foot from the rickety fender, which had tilted under its pressure; "I have thought of it so often, our meeting after twenty years. I did not suppose that we should really meet. But I nursed the idea for my pleasure—I have not had many." He spoke with difficulty, almost as if he wrung each sentence out with a separate effort; but as he went on, as a machine works more easily and quickly with growing heat, so his speech came, and his story was told clearly, as if he had told it more than once before. Considering it later, I felt sure that he had pleased himself in his solitude by rehearsing that confession to myself which he had expected never to make.

"I the strongest!" he said. "I thought so too. When I left Oxford, I worked at law; but that was too slow. I sent a letter on a matter of finance to a paper. They printed it. The editor sent for me. There was a want of men who could deal with figures. I worked for him and was well paid. I read law by day and economics at night. I had started, was confident, was happy in my way. One day the

private secretary of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer came to see me. He was a clever man, not much older than I. He had seen something which I had written; he had discussed it with his chief; he told me roundly that I had my fortune in my hands. I thought so too.

“If I ever thought of Oxford with regret, it was of our meetings in your rooms on the old corner staircase. I don’t think you can know how a lonely boy, as I was, can make so much of so little. To you it was one of many interests; to me it was all I cared to remember in Oxford—except, perhaps, my lonely tramps about the hills, the shiny little field-paths, some of those views when one looks back and down on the towers and spires and the river gleaming. I had to walk then to keep well; and I found in London that I had to walk. I used to walk in the early morning, or in the evening with smudged gas-light or dull yellow shop-windows for the fields and trees.” Here he stopped till I looked up questioning, and then he went on less slowly. “One evening I started earlier than usual. I remember that my eyes ached from reading so long by the

light of a gas-jet. There had been thick fog all day. So I set out earlier. I did not mind the fog. I had walked through the fog on other days and liked it. I used to map all London roundabout my lodgings in my head and see how nearly I could get it right. When a fog came, I liked to plunge into it and walk the streets freely, turning this way and that, and coming back to my door without mistake or hesitation. I must have had some childhood left in me. This fog was the thickest I had met; that stirred me the more. I plunged in. I felt myself master of the fog, full, as I knew, of feeble folk drifting helpless. I went on freely, singularly happy. If my bosom's lord ever sat lightly on his throne, it was then. After walking for half-an-hour, I came, as I meant to come, to the railings of the Park, and I grasped one of them, cold and damp, with the feeling of a conqueror, of a discoverer. Then a thought caught me. To go walking on with the railings by my side was fool's work. What if I struck inward across the Park, across the grass, with nothing to guide me? The thought fired me. I walked along by the railings till I came to a small gate, then paused to make

sure of my direction, and then struck out across the Park. I seemed to force a passage through the fog, so dense it was; I felt the grass beneath my feet, but nothing else; I remember how my eyes smarted.

"Then there was something; I was aware of something close to me in the density; I touched something and heard a scream. I held the thing and felt clothes. Then came a torrent of sobs and prayers to be saved and what not, and I knew that it was a woman. 'Stop!' I said—'stop!' and I shook her a little; 'what is the matter?'

"She sobbed out that she was lost. All this clamour about being lost in a fog! I could feel her shiver. I had never laid hand on a woman before. I could not see her, but somehow I guessed that she was young. 'If you don't stop,' I said, 'I will leave you here in the fog.' She broke out again with prayers that I would not leave her; and then, as I said nothing, she tried to be quiet, only sobbing. I moved my hand down the sleeve, heavy with damp, and found her hand, which shocked me by its thinness. I hardly dared to hold it, but it clutched my hand with a feverish hold. Then I stopped to think.

I had lost my bearings ; I did not know to what point of the compass I was facing. But I was sure that I could keep a line ; and so I went forward slowly, leading her—leading her. My only thought was to keep straight. I was forced to go round trees and other things, but I kept my line and so came at last to the railings of the Park. There I was at a loss again ; I could not tell if I were on the north or south of the Park, whether my way lay east or west. I chose a direction ; but when I had passed beyond the railings I came presently to a stop, for the first turning did not come where it should have come according to the plan in my mind. We had left one gas-light behind us, and the next was not yet visible before us ; so I turned back with her and stopped, and close under the light of the lamp I could just see how slender a creature I held. When we turned back, her sobs had broken out afresh ; and I spoke sternly to her, trying to make her understand that now no mistake was possible, but that, if she did not walk quietly with me, I would leave her then and there. If she would walk quietly, I would place her with a trustworthy woman for the night, and to-morrow she should go home. That

is what I said. To-morrow! To-morrow! That is what I said in my shallow confidence. I could not distinguish the features of her face as she turned it to mine; but I made out from her few indistinct words that she had been with her father and had lost him in the fog. 'I will find him to-morrow,' I said. Then I led her back, came again to the Park railings, traversed their length and found my familiar streets, and brought her to the door of my lodging. The woman of the house was nervous, I could see, about taking in an unknown young woman; but I was sharp with her. I settled that the girl should be put in my room for the night, and fed and nursed, if need were; and then I went out again to a little dark hotel above a flaming bar at the street-corner. I am too long with such details; I cannot tell it all like this; but I cannot pick and choose; my head has been tired. I am better since I came here, but I have to tell the tale as it comes to me, or I could not tell it at all. I will try and be shorter with the rest."

I told him, as was true, that I wanted to hear all; and from that point he went on to the end with no break, no apology.

"The next morning I went early to ask about

her. The woman said that she slept still ; she was not ill, she thought, but tired and underfed. I could not see her. It seemed strange to me that I did not know her by sight. The woman had found out her name and showed it to me on an envelope which had been in the pocket of her gown. I had to give up my morning's work and to look for a man of that name who had lost a daughter in the fog. It did not take long. At the first police station I heard the news. A man of that name had been killed in the fog, knocked down by a frightened hansom-horse in a street near the Park. I saw the body, a thin, worn body in a threadbare coat. He had been half starved, as I could see ; he had fallen from weakness probably as much as from the blow of the horse. And then I found out who he was—a man devoted to research, an authority in an obscure line of study, one of those from whose loose webs a brilliant writer weaves a successful work. They knew him at the British Museum, and somebody there could tell me where he lived. I went to his poor lodging, but there they knew no more of him ; they had never seen any friend nor relation except his daughter ; he owed a trifle for rent. I paid it. I advertised, but got no

answers. I never found any one who claimed them in any way; she could never tell me of any one. Do you see how she was thrust upon my hands? She was so weak that she could not be moved. I did not see her; but I saw the doctor, and I told him that I would pay. He told me that she must be left alone, allowed to rest and eat; she had scarcely asked about her father. I went back to my work and worked harder, for there was the doctor to be paid and my bill at the hotel and delicate food and things for her. I had money enough. My fellowship was for three years, and with what I earned by writing I was a rich man, living as I lived. I had been saving money from my first day in London.

“Then came the day when I saw her. When I went in the morning (I went every morning) to ask about her, I met the doctor at the door, and he said that she wished to see me. She had been told, by-the-bye, some time before, of her father's death; she had borne it well, they said. The doctor went upstairs, and I followed. I was amazed by the thumping of my heart; my throat and mouth were so dry that I thought I should not be able to speak. I had been deaf and blind to women; I had meant

to be deaf and blind to women till my fortune was made; and now I was brought into this young girl's room. I followed the doctor like a dog; I stumbled on the threshold; the dull, familiar carpet of my room was the first thing which I saw. It was my room, but changed—with women's things which I vaguely recognised. And then I saw her. She was leaning back on pillows, wrapped and folded up in a great knitted thing—pink it was. The doctor bent down to her and gave her something to drink. I noticed the undulations of the soft throat as she drank. She had blue eyes, I saw as she turned them towards the window, towards me.

“Then came the day when she was quite well, or so the doctor said, and I had to speak to her of plans, and ask her what she meant to do. She fell into a passion of tears, as at our first meeting. She prayed me not to leave her. She clung to me. How could I leave her? She was the most helpless creature in the world. She could do nothing to make money; she could scarcely sew. I promised nothing, but I soothed her. She was lovely in my eyes.

"Then came the day when the woman of the house complained. Other lodgers, she said, had spoken, had objected to this young girl who was kept there by me, a young man. Measure my ignorance who had thought myself so wise! I had never thought of such objection, such complaint. I stammered in my surprise and anger; the devil's jargon of these virtuous souls sickened me and stopped my tongue; I merely said that she should go. I took her away and found her other, better lodgings—I could afford her better—and I went there too; and so those people were justified. They thrust us down—but I must not say that. I was to blame, and no other—I, only I, with all my fine strength and wisdom and purpose to mould my life as I chose.

"At her weakness, her helplessness, I felt no surprise. I supposed that all women were like that. She seemed happy in little things, odds and ends of daily life; and I had my work; and I worked hard. The success was beginning to come. A year or so went by (my memory plays me tricks about that time, which seems to me now shorter than it could have been, like a day of peace between storm and

storm), and then came that other day—O God, that I outlived that day and night!

“We had walked one evening on the Embankment, she and I; and she had prattled of the river and the lights, and had said, laughing, that she supposed that but for me she should have ended, as other girls had ended, under that creeping tide; and then she turned cold and shivered, and clutched my arm and begged to be taken home. It was on the morning after that that the editor of the paper for which I wrote sent for me and asked me if I would go at once to South America. There had been a revolution in a young republic after a foreign war; the interests of rich Englishmen might be in danger; no trustworthy information of the financial state of the country, nor of the honesty of the new Government, could be obtained. Some powerful houses in London had determined to send out somebody at once who could report to them the real state of affairs, and utter, if need were, a timely word of warning to the Government about the payment of the interest of their foreign debt. Even the Government, though not appearing in the matter, had shown interest in the choice of the envoy,

so anxious were they for trustworthy information in place of contradictory telegrams. My acquaintance, the Chancellor's secretary, had been to see the editor; my name had been mentioned and received well by everybody. Letters of recommendation were ready; and the editor was authorized to name a sum as recompense, beyond all expenses, which was very great for me; but I must decide now. Would I go? Could I go at once?

"He saw my hesitation and spoke out. It was a chance which comes once in life. It was an important, not a showy embassy. My name, if possible, would be kept from the papers; but I should earn the gratitude of City and of Government—no less than that. He was not a demonstrative man, but he leaned forward and pressed my arm as he said, 'You are made for the job. This is your tide; go out on it—go out on it! The boat goes from the London docks the day after to-morrow, early. Your passage is taken and paid for. Any sum less than the entire fee for the job I am to advance to you.'

"As he spoke, my thoughts had been flying back and forward, to that home of mine, to this

splendid opportunity. Here was the chance on which I had always calculated, but in a form more exquisitely tempting than I had ever imagined. Money—but that was the least part; responsibility, power (for I had even power to treat under certain circumstances); but most of all this making of successful men my debtors—the foundation of a claim, the real start in life. He need not have said a word of its advantages; I grasped them all. It filled the outline which I had drawn for myself as a boy at Oxford. My hour had come. And my accursed folly stood in my way—barred my path. I had taken her; how could I leave her, incarnate helplessness that she was? I was bound. But was I bound? Because I had saved a girl from starvation, was my whole life's plan to be ruined? Was this my sense? I was bound by nothing but the mere remnant of superstitions from which I had boasted myself free. I would leave her all my savings, 'amply provided for,' as the phrase goes. This was the crisis to try me, and I would arrange it as I thought right; and I thought it right (I told myself so as I sat with that man's eyes upon me) to leave this woman and take up my life. A few years and it would be the same

to her and to me as if we had never met; it will be all the same a few years hence; death ends all. I was not bound by any law, human or divine. This business gave me the very excuse which I needed for breaking from these weakening bonds. I was not bound—I was not bound; I was free to go, and go I would. Let her float! I would go. ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I will go.’ He shook my hand, and then took from a desk and gave me a bundle of letters, and a roll of bank-notes, as many as I thought it well to take with me. He wrote down for me the hour at which the steamer would start. To miss that boat meant a fortnight’s delay. In revolutionary hours in South America events move quickly. ‘Your mission is now or never,’ he said; ‘they would never forgive a delay.’ ‘It shall be now,’ I said.

“So I went out from that man with my mind made up. ‘Death ends all,’ hummed in my head as I walked. I had plenty to do, and I settled the order of my doings. I would buy a long frieze overcoat and thick rug for shipboard; I would go to my banker and get a sum of money for her and arrange that she was to draw when she pleased till all the rest was gone; I would

call on a City magnate who (so my editor had told me) had expressed a willingness to see me ; and then I would go home and at a certain hour on the next morning I would tell her all. There would be an unpleasant scene ; but less than twenty-four hours later salt water would be between us, broader and broader ; I should have shaken my folly from me forever and ever.

"I carried out my programme. I bought the things for my journey ; I settled matters at the bank and endured the leer of the respectable young man with whom I settled them ; I saw the great financier and measured the value of my mission by the labored civility of a man whose habitual arrogance one felt ; and then I went home and at the appointed hour of the next morning I reached the last item. I would give one hour to her ; and then I would go. I would go straight to the docks and sleep on board that night, and in the early dawn move seaward, a free man. It was all so simple.

"There was a scene as I expected, worse than I expected. When the front door shut behind me, I felt for all my arguments like a hunted thief—like Judas. I lifted my portmanteau on to the cab myself and told him where to go—to

the docks where the ship lay. The woman of the house stood by me on the pavement, anxious to be of use ; I had paid her rent for many weeks in advance. 'See that she wants for nothing,' I said—'for nothing.'

"My things were all on board. In the evening I walked about the docks to tire myself, longing for the morning, to be afloat. Suddenly I saw the woman of the house there, white, almost breathless. She had heard my directions to the cabman and had come with hope of finding me. 'When you had gone,' she said, 'she was like a mad-woman, laughing and crying out about the river ; and later, when I had gone out to fetch the doctor to her, she went away with no cloak nor anything to cover her—only snatched up her hat and went, the servant said.'

"I can't talk of that. I thought that she was dead. I went straight home. She had not come back. I went to the police station and then to the Embankment. And there I walked all night in torment. I looked again and again upon the tide. This was that flooding tide upon whose ebb I was to go forth to fortune. Now and then I saw something in the river and stopped and peered ; and the strange thing was

that I prayed, prayed in agony. I had not prayed since the easy prayers of childhood, and this was agony. All night I walked like that, my whole self one prayer that this crime might not be; and when the dawn began to peer, I fell against the stones praying.

“A policeman shook me, and I got up and called a cab and went home, and the door was opened by the woman of the house, who told me that she was safe—that she had come home before me—tired out—asleep. I understood just that: I was numbed; I could hardly think. I crept upstairs. There she lay sleeping, like a child. While I watched her, I felt safe. I sat silent, watching. There was a small clock like a toy in the room; I could just see its hands in the dim light; I took out my watch to compare it, but I had not wound it and it had stopped. Then in the silence a clock began to strike; I counted the low strokes: it was the hour at which the steamer started.

“She was still asleep, worn out, when I left the house that morning. It was still early, and I went to the private house of the editor. He started from his chair when he saw me. I laid the bank-notes and the parcel of letters on his

breakfast-table ; and, before I could speak, he broke into angry words. It was natural ; he thought that he had made himself responsible for me—that he would feel the displeasure of his great men, political and financial. I had nothing to say except that I was sorry. ‘You well may be sorry,’ he said ; ‘you have done for yourself.’ I never went back to him ; I never saw him again, nor the great man in the City, nor the secretary of the Chancellor. From the editor’s house I went to a registrar’s office ; I made all necessary arrangements ; on the next day we were married.

“I was obliged to live carefully. My fellowship stopped at my marriage ; my money at the bank was no great sum. I found work on another paper, writing on finance and on anything that was wanted. I had no fear for a home and food—those, at least, she should have ; and I saw her grow stronger, less thin, less pale. For myself, I was numbed. I did my work well, for I had the habit of careful work. I did not expect, I did not wish that it should lead to anything ; I did not know what had become of my ambition ! I was numbed. Only sometimes I was moved to wonder by the memory of my

agony of prayer on that night. It seemed impossible. I shrank from the memory of the pain and yet half wished that I could feel some part of it again.

"Sometimes, too, in intervals of work I wondered what sort of being this was whom I had made my wife. I had taken her as one takes home for pity a half-starved dog ; I had bound her to me that I might never even think of leaving her. But of her I knew next to nothing. I never questioned her about her movements on that awful night, and she never spoke of them to me. Nor had I any knowledge of women which could help me to understand this one. Only one thing I thought I knew, and that seemed enough. I thought that she was weak beyond all possibility of a man's weakness ; that she leaned wholly upon me ; that she would act always as I ordered. So I did not trouble myself in the apathy of my days, and I worked hard, and she grew stronger—prettier too, I came to know, for when I walked with her, I could see men look at her in the street. Then, as she grew stronger, I found—at first I could not believe it—I found that she could resist me. She never disputed ; but again and

again she did not do what I had told her to do, once or twice she did what I had told her not to. I put it down to childishness, to incredible forgetfulness; I thought all women were like that. But I slowly found out too that she was bored. While she was weak and ill, she had been content with rest; but as she grew stronger, she wanted amusement, pleasure; and I was helpless there. She spoke sometimes of her life with her father. It had not been gay, but I could see that she had found it more gay than this. I tried—I made clumsy efforts to please her. I cut my work shorter that I might take her out more. A day, a minute showed me the uselessness of all. It was a bright day and I had asked her to come for a walk. As we walked, I tried subject after subject, but could rouse no interest in her. Then suddenly at some words of mine she turned dimpling and smiling towards me. I felt that I had found the key; my heart leaped up. What might not life be yet? A great tenderness in me answered the brightness of her face. The next moment I saw that its brightness was not for me. A young man was passing, smartly dressed, looking at my wife with smiling admiration. She

smiled on me and looked full of interest in my words that a chance passer might think her pretty. I felt it; I knew it; I knew her in that moment. So soon as she had any strength of life, she turned to admiration: admiration was the very breath of her life. I knew her, and the knowledge shook me to a new despair, to a horror of the life before us. You see, I knew nothing of women, nothing of the world; I could not take life with a humorous smile or cynical grin, as writers of books seem to take it. I had need of some reality. Ambition had failed me; love had failed me; what was there? Life does not wait till we find an answer. Day follows day, and one lives. Our home did not seem wretched; she made it pretty. I worked as much as I could at the office of the paper.

“Then came the day when my son was born. It did not seem so great a thing at the time. I thought of it almost wholly as a new interest, a new plaything for my wife. I hoped that she would be happier. She was happier for a time; but when her baby was only two years old, she left him. She had said once or twice that she could not bear our dreary life; and she wrote that again in the note which she left for me. I

did not rest till I had found her. I told her to come back to her child and I would pardon her. She cried a little; I might as well have tried to mould the air. I waited near by for the man, and I met him in the dusk at the gate. He tried to push by me, but I held him till he had heard me: I was always strong. I told him that he had taken a burden which he must bear—that, if I heard of her deserted or ill treated, I would kill him. It was true; my purpose was quite plain; I would have killed him and given myself up to the police. Then I loosed him and went back to my home and to my child. Not long afterwards a lawyer came to see me, to ask if I would sue for a divorce. I got the divorce, and the man married her. I believe that they are happy.

“Then I lived a lonely life, though now and then I heard the cry of the baby in the house. I did not care if he lived or died. It was so miserable a world that I could not wish him to live in it. I had lost, I thought, my own wish to live, though, had the house caught fire, I should have fought for life, I suppose. It seemed to me a world for the heartless, for those like her to find comfort, amusement, pleasure. Fame

was a bauble for those as light as she. Wealth was a good thing for such, as she, who wished to live softly. Soft living choked me with the mere thought of it. It was that which drew me, I think, to the hard life of the poor. Wandering, when my work was done, I chanced one night on a foul court where poor people lived, and drunken, and shameless. I went back on other nights; I made acquaintance there. And I found people trying to help, to do good—women who had put aside soft things to slave in these harsh places; and at first I thought that they were showing off in some way. And there was an East-End curate working there, who was suspicious of me, naturally enough. But at last he, and the women too, seemed to decide that I was harmless, and they gradually began to make use of me in little things, the fetching food or physic, or the carrying a hurt child to the chemist's. Then one day the young man, the curate, followed me home. He was amazed at my indifference to my son. I think that it was then that I realized how time was passing, as I saw the child walk to him, this stranger, and prattle to him. I saw that the baby was growing into a child. The curate came again; he came often;

in time he began to talk to me, as clergymen talk ; but his words were the crackling of thorns to me. He had not been where I had been. But I let him have his way with the child. Had I found a better way ? Had I found truth ? Let the child try another path. My heart began to stir towards my boy. Here is his picture."

From the mantel-piece close to his hand he took a photograph and passed it to me. I guessed that the boy was fifteen or sixteen years old ; it was a happy school-boy face ; I liked it and I said so.

"I have kept him at a good school ; I worked hard for that. He has done well enough ; and they all think well of him. He has known no sorrow nor doubt. If it comes to him, he will come to me and I am ready for him. I have gone over all our old round ; I have pieced together the formulæ which I despised, and rebuilt for myself, and for him, if the need come, the philosophy of the schools. If this child wake some day and think himself a mere clod of earth or scrap of a machine moved by a blind necessity, I can at least deliver him from the burden of that death. I can at least show him

that the simplest thing which he knows could not be without his combining and comparing; that the barest idea of duty could never have come from appetites alone. I can show him where his freedom lies, in his power over his own character, and in how true a sense God is in the world and in him. Working over the old ground again mainly for his sake, I have found great comfort for myself. As for my boy, I hope that he will never need my help. I take him to be *φύσει ἀγαθός*, a happy nature. I don't know if he is very clever. He is religious in a simple way, and would like to make his life after the pattern of the life of Christ. Have you or I a better pattern to show him? He is still a friend of the curate, who is a vicar now, still in the East-End. It was he who sent me to this place. They ask no profession of faith here for those who come for rest, only a promise to live as the rest, not to go beyond the boundaries without leave, to go daily to prayers. And I go gladly. What if I have not much to say? I can at least lie prostrate before the throne of God."

A fire burned in him. I was strangely moved and somehow shamed. I pressed his hands and

thanked him and left him. The autumn evening held the air when I went out :

“ The holy time was quiet as a nun
Breathless with adoration.”

A trouble of the soul filled my eyes with tears. My young friend whom I had come to see was waiting for me ; and, as he walked with me to the station, for I was going away by train, he prattled of the value of the place, of the great benefit which he had derived from his brief seclusion from all the troubles of life, from this peaceful time in which he had possessed his soul.

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